The Goodness of God: Volume 1

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

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Preface

I often have the lingering sensation NOT of achieving some elevated spiritual state of being, but instead basically "stumbling" into God's goodness, wisdom, and kindness.

Whether it be tender theology, curative cuddling, or embraceable epiphanies, I routinely feel dizzy and dazzled at the Lord's light show. Honestly, I just frequently seem to haphazardly stumble into the pockets of God's prismatic provision.

I'm reminded of an unforgettable scene of affection, which is a perfect illustration. Two years ago, I saw the most wonderful hug between a young couple right down the street from the Ringgold City Court.

They were ecstatic to see each other. The young man sprinted into her excited arms, and they started twirling

around and around, almost falling several times but somehow awkwardly staggering to keep upright. All the while, they were smiling, kissing, and laughing cheek to cheek.

As a synchronized and elegant dance, it was an awkward and absolute failure. As the most utterly romantic thing I've seen in a long time… well, they crushed it.

I'm beginning to think raw, real, and unfeigned love is too uncoordinated to follow a meticulous protocol of prescribed movement — it's just too excitable, too wonderfully clumsy, and too spontaneously cackle-inducing to resemble a perfectly elegant Fred Astaire dance routine.

Love is more like a roller coaster than a rowboat. A few more klutzy hugs might be just the thing the God of reckless love ordered.

It seems that Abba's Spirit often works a Christological klutziness in us. And maybe that's why the observers of "Pentecost descending" assumed the early believers were drunk with wine.

Maybe "clumsy and goofy" is the new "smooth and elegant." Righteous rhythms of well-intentioned whackiness.

Introduction

This is where I will write a brief explanation of the structure of the book, and that the material, most of it anyway, came from your social media posts. This front section is usually short and practical.

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Part 1

Chapter One

Awesome Thoughts

Condemnation deforms people. Mercy reforms people.

What makes God great is not just that He never leaves a good man or woman behind.

What makes God great is that He never leaves a bad man or bad woman behind, either.

He cures us all. (Matthew 5:38–48)

God is the Father of lights, not the Father of plights.

Blind love" is good. "Visionary love" is even better.

Blind love that overlooks faults is good.

However, visionary love that penetrates past surface appearances and sees inherent worth and imbedded beauty is even better

The greatest enemy of unconditional love is NOT hate.

The greatest enemy of unconditional love IS……. conditional love.

Human judgment often condemns and crushes.

Divine judgment always helps and heals.

Why don't we get this?

Jesus is Jehovah-Rapha (the God that heals), not Jehovah-the-Ripper.

The real Armageddon is the final battle for the image of God, which is taking place on the Megiddo plains of our minds and hearts.

Don't ever GIVE in or GIVE up. Instead, GO in and GO up.

God is good-- only good, always good, only light and in Him no darkness. He gives only good gifts to His children, and in Him is no shadow of turning. He is the Father of lights, love, and lightness of burden. Enjoy Him.

Instead of weaponizing the allegories of Scripture, we should allegorize the weapons of Scripture.

Jesus came to reveal that unforgiveness was our issue, not His.

God's love wants to judge Hell OUT of us. Man's wrath wants to judge Hell INTO us.

Man's judgments are destructive and dehumanizing. God's judgements are curative and restorative.

What Jesus STOPPED: sickness, storms, and stonings.

What Jesus STARTED: dead hearts, live encounters, and a new and living way.

Don't accuse Jesus of starting what He wants stopped or stopping what He wants started.

Our human willingness to abandon one another at "the drop of a circumstantial hat" is only exceeded by Jesus' eternally steadfast refusal to abandon ANYbody at "the drop of ANY hat."

We need to ascend to His standard, not drag Him down to ours.

Moses showed us an image of God capable of great cruelty.

Jesus showed us an image of God incapable of any cruelty. (Matthew 5:38-48)

If the very first thing we tell someone is that they need to repent, we're missing the heart of the Gospel.

Jesus' first word to people was to establish a relationship, not repentance. "God loves you and I love you" is the prologue to sparking relational encounters.

However, when we insert a perverse prologue such as, "God loathes you as you are, so you must repent," we have turned something beautiful and alluring into something hideous and threatening.

The Gospel is the good news of a good God, not the bad news of a terroristic threat. Needed repentance will come in the WAKE of someone knowing that they are loved, not BEFORE it.

I think the aromas that come from our "fractured hallelujahs" are so much sweeter and mellifluous than our "high ground hallelujahs," which have no brokenness or anguish.

In our failures and weaknesses, we find the greater depths of His forgiving power. It allows us to then "love much." Luke 7:47.

You lost me at "Some will be forever lost and eternally tormented."

Nope. God's better than that.

Infinitely better and brighter than that.

My spiritual money is on GOD's "infinite" ability to wash, woo, and win us, RATHER than our "finite" ability to resist, resent, and reject Him.

Sometimes I think the only thing we leave this world with is the image of God we have devotionally developed and evolved over our lifetime.

Our heart's image of Him is the conceptual crown we will joyfully cast at the Lord's feet. The better and brighter our view of Jesus is HERE, the more glorious this offering will be THERE.

But that's not the only reason.

A.W. Tozer believed that every person, "by a secret law of the soul," grows to resemble their image of God, for better and for worse. For this reason, what we think about God deeply and dynamically matters. It's our pearl of great value.

Instead of squandering our energies on imagining WHY God hates certain displeasing people, let's INSTEAD seek to energetically envision why a God of infinite love DOESN'T.

What we do (or don't do) DOES matter— to some degree.

What God has already done REALLY matters— to every degree.

We have the power to obstruct or surrender. He has the power to ensure and engender.

Let's not assign to God any words or deeds which we can't also, in good conscience, assign to Jesus.

What Jesus never did, the Father has never done, and the Spirit will never do.

God's "commands" are NOT written on stone tablets or human parchment.

God's "commands" ARE the heart-engraved epiphanies of divine love which prompt, persuade, and empower us to walk as children of light.

Behold the wrath of God!

Jesus reconciles with a vengeance!

He furiously forgives!

His mercy mauls judgment.

My favorite exorcism was when Jesus cast the attributes of the devil OUT of OUR image of God.

Rule of cosmic thumb.

If it's not heroic, it's not Jesus.

Jesus defeats and empties Hell.

He doesn't finalize and fill it.

Part 2

God Is Good

Chapter Two

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL?

Why does God allow evil? It's pretty simple. He doesn't. No way.

Jesus Christ IS God's complete DISallowance of evil.

The more enlightened question is HOW does Jesus' disallowance of evil "unfurl" itself over space and time.

Jesus only and always plays the long game.

Jesus never forcefully coerces.

He only tenderly convinces.

The Quakers call it "gentle persuasion."

God overcomes all evil with all good.

It takes tender time and infinite patience.

Jesus always loves and blesses enemy and friend alike by ever turning the cosmic cheek, always walking the extra mile of care, and perpetually giving the extra garment of kindness.

Jesus will ultimately win all humanity, both corporately and individually. In fact, He already has. Our perception of it just needs to catch up.

And it will.

The eyes of our understanding WILL be enlightened.

Chapter Three

God Is Only Lover And Never Killer

BACK THEN, the first Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowing God as BOTH Good and Evil.

---They saw God as BOTH light and dark.

---They saw God as BOTH lover and killer.

---They saw God as BOTH afflicter and healer.

This toxic fruit gave them a dualistic, bipolar, and incoherent view of God.

BUT NOW, the second Adam (Jesus), Eve (His bride), and we (as children of the light) are able to eat from the Tree of Knowing God as ONLY Life Abundant.

---They see God as ONLY light and NEVER dark.

---They see God as ONLY lover and NEVER killer.

---They see God as ONLY healer and NEVER afflicter.

This delicious messianic fruit has restored our spiritual sanity by presenting us with a non-dualistic image of a flawlessly heroic Husband God.

Zeus would overcome evil by hurling a billion wrathful lightning bolts of brutality— and in so doing becomes the very thing he hates —an evil deity.

Jesus overcomes evil only with good— and thus ever remains a God of love and light.

How a non-coercive God overcomes evil is entirely and eternally different than how a coercive God would attempt to do it.

Love never coerces.

It only woos with "gentle persuasion."

Chapter Four

God's love throws away the sword.

Human wrath throws away the scabbard and keeps the sword ever in hand.

God's love throws away the sword and keeps the scabbard ever empty.

Consider this excerpt from Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" where we see the 'Angel of Christmas Present' carry an ever-empty scabbard eaten up with ancient rust.

"'Come in' exclaimed the Angel. 'Come in! and know me better man!'"

“Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though (its eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them."

"’I am the Angel of Christmas Present,’ said the Spirit. ‘Look upon me!’”

“Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple, deep green robe or mantle bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare: and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath set here and there, with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free: free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.”

"’You have never seen the like of me before!’ exclaimed the Spirit.”

In one version of this story, Scrooge later asked the Angel of Christmas present why He had no sword, to which the Spirit responded, “Peace on earth, good will to man.”

Let’s all “look upon Him” and “get to know Him better”, His “sparkling eye,” His “genial face,” His “horn

of plenty", His "open hand," His "cheery voice," His "unconstrained demeanor," and His "joyful air."

Let's all follow suit and empty our souls' scabbards and fill our hearts with His light and love.

Chapter Five

God does indeed play favorites.

Contrary to popular belief, God does indeed play favorites.

All the time.

Everytime.

But the thing is… we are each equally His favorite.

No second-place ribbons.

No secondhand love.

No alternate selections.

All are in the Beloved.

All ARE the beloved.

That's what an organic ocean of omnipotent love does for us.

God loves the person we hate the most every bit as much as He loves Jesus, Paul, Mary, Martha, and all the others… including us.

And, well, if the person we loathe more than anybody else IS ourselves… God especially loves us every bit as much as He loves the greatest saint.

To truly fulfill Christian love, it's enemy love or it's nothing.

And I'm sure it's not "nothing."

Jesus said His Abba's perfection lies in how He loves and blesses His/our enemies with the same amount of quality love and fierce devotion He lavishes on the greatest saints.

Chapter Six

If it's not of Jesus, it's not of the Father.

If it's not of Jesus, it's not of the Father. If it's not of the Spirit, it's not of Jesus. If it's not of love, it's not of the Trinity. God IS Spirit and God IS love.

Let me put it another way. If, in our heart of hearts, we can't see Jesus ever doing something cruel or oppressive, then we must likewise refuse to see the Father willing it from heaven, or the Spirit sanctioning it on the earth.

If it's not good, it's not God. As James 1 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from the Father of lights above in whom there is no shadow of turning."

Chapter Seven

God's judgements are His cures.

The Greek word for "judgment" used in New Testament Scripture is "krisis," etymologically related to our English word "crisis." Crisis is a Latinized form of the Greek "krisis," and means "the turning point in a disease" (used as such by Hippocrates and Galen), literally "judgment."

Here is one of the biggest blind spots in the body of Christ: God judges us to eternally CURE us, not to eternally CRUSH us. His judgment represents "the krisis point" of our soul-sickness when the tide starts to turn toward our full recovery.

Here is another key Greek word that reinforces this same idea. The only word in the Gospels for "punishment" with regard to God punishing evildoers is "kolasis," which according to Aristotle, who knew Greek word meanings better than anybody who ever walked the planet, said that "kolasis" is the kind of punishment which "is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer," which means it is for the rehabilitation, betterment and improvement of the person being punished. This is contrasted with "timoria," which Aristotle said is the kind of punishment which is "inflicted in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction." (Rhet. 1369b13).

So, using these two crucial terms in tandem, Christ is revealed as the cosmic champion of crisis management ("God's got this") and rehabilitative therapy ("God's got you").

Chapter Eight

God's glory is His goodness.

Why do I spend so much time sharing about God's goodness?

Because when Moses prayed to see "God 's glory," God responded that "I will cause my goodness to pass before you."

God's glory IS His goodness.

To be obsessed with God's glory is to be obsessed with His virtue, His love, His light, His tenderness, etc. I feel so sorry for people who see God as a killer, afflicter, and oppressor. They are glory-deprived.

Four great awakenings to God's forgiveness.

The first great awakening: "I forgive you."

The second great awakening: "I have never been unforgiving toward you."

The third great awakening: "It's not about my unforgiveness at all, but yours— individually, corporately, both toward yourselves and others. You've projected your own unforgiveness on my image. I'm not that way, and never was."

The fourth great awakening: "I'm your Abba, I love you richly— that's each and every one of you— equally, eternally, and unrelentingly. I'm here, not only to comfort and cohabitate with you at your core by my Spirit, but to also help renew you to limitless love."

God is not both light and dark.

It's time to kick the dualistic image of God to the curb. God is NOT both light and dark, NOT both good and evil, and NOT both Heaven-inhaling and Hell-snorting.

Here is my proposal as to which spiritual issue we should be "all in" on by pushing all our spiritual chips to the center of the cosmic table. Everybody needs to have some serious "skin in the game" on the issue of God being "only" and "always" good.

And by "skin in the game," I mean devotional focus, devotional energy, and devotional resolve.

Invest your heart in this simple notion. God's goodness is non-dualistic. Jesus is no Jekyll and Hyde. The Father is no Janus-faced deity. The Holy Spirit is no bipolar monster.

The non-dualistic goodness of the Godhead means simply that the Lord is "light only" of essence, "love only" of purpose, and "lightness only" of burden.

Chapter Nine

Core knowledge of God's nature.

What I have read about God, particularly in Scripture, has blessed and complemented my relationship with God beyond measure.

However, my CORE (and I do mean deep, deep, deep, core) belief about God's nature does NOT come from what I have read about Him.

Rather, what I believe about God's character comes from what I have personally observed ABOUT Him and experienced FROM and THROUGH Him.

His incredible tenderness and relentless goodwill have shown toward me have revealed more to me about Him than a million books from a thousand libraries.

I have seen a vicious murderer I represented in court transformed into a loving lamb. And in so doing, he named a name.

I have seen emaciated drug addicts become fat in God's goodness. And they named a name.

I have seen hard and hateful criminal hearts changed into soft and absorbent poultices of healing. And they named a name.

I have seen abusive parents transformed into the tenderest of shepherds. And they named a name.

I have seen infertile women diagnosed with severe endometriosis who were healed and bore children. And they named a name.

And this name has a nature. That name is Jesus. For the Hebrews, somebody's "name" represented their "nature." Jesus was the revelation of God's nature. And that nature has no darkness, no malice, and no hostile intent. It has only love, light, and lightness.

And this is something the early church fathers and mothers knew. They knew the restorative nature of God at their core.

And this core knowledge of Himself, which then allowed them to properly read Scripture non-violently, because they ALREADY had been touched by the nature of God.

They named a name. A nature. A pneumatic nature. A nice nature. A noble nature.

This is why we must let the living nature of God interpret Scripture rather than allowing the dead letter of Scripture to define God's nature.

Chapter Ten

Abba loves us.

Abba loves us. That will never change. The New Testament revelation of God is as a non-dualistic being of ONLY love and ETERNAL light with no shadow of turning… AT ALL. (1 John 4:8; 1 John 1:5; James 1:16-17).

This shadowless light is an eternal quality of God forever expressed by and through Jesus as the exact and full representation of the divine Logos.

Regarding God...

Love is not His divine theology.

Non-violence is not His divine philosophy.

Healing is not His divine hobby.

Forgiveness is not His divine decision.

The above virtues are not divine choices, but rather are divine attributes.

Jesus' virtues are constituent elements of His essence, seamlessly weaved into the cloak of His internal and eternal being.

Philosophies can change. Constituent qualities never do. They are eternal.

When we say God is immutable, this is what we mean. He changes not. He is a ready rock of rescue, an ever-present help in time of need. How that help manifests and operates may vary from case to case, but God always hastens to the highest available good.

What a relief.

Jesus is no fickle Zeus who hurls lightning bolts at those who displease Him. He is no double-faced Janus of alternating wrath and love. He is no moody deity capable of reactionary hate or petulant pettiness.

Jesus doesn't just act consistently. He is consistency itself.

God doesn't choose love. He IS love.

God doesn't select forgiveness. He IS forgiveness.

God doesn't deliberate to heal. He IS healing.

God doesn't kill. He IS life.

God doesn't philosophize about virtue. He IS virtue.

To worship Christ is not to worship some unknowable God who selfishly and narcissistically demands our love.

Rather, Christ is love's essence personified, light's essence personified, lightness' essence personified, and virtue's essence personified.

To worship Jesus is to worship the essence of all that is good, true, clean, and pure. As we worship Him with our hearts' single-eyed focus, we become progressively transformed into His same image, faith to faith and glory to glory.

Jesus eagerly waits for each of us like a dad exhorting his young child to jump into the pool with our whole being, where His arms await to catch us and keep us aloft. He wants us to swim with Him in the curative waters of all His glorious virtues, SO THAT we can become like Him.

Humanity's flaw is that we keep trying to JAM the idea of "preferences" into the idea of divine love.

It won't fit.

We are the ones who "chain" the notion of preferences to love, not God, never God.

God loves all and each.

Eternally.

Limitlessly.

Indefatigably.

Without preference.

Without condition.

Without qualification.

Without reservation.

Without retraction.

Chapter Eleven

God's dilemma in communicating with fractured humanity.

Here is God's dilemma in communicating with fractured humanity. How can a God who thinks and speaks only life communicate effectively to a people who have been culturally conditioned to think and hear only death?

Humans hear every "life offer" given by God as a "death threat."

Humans process every "exhortation" by God as a "condemnation."

Every "praise party" from God eventually degenerates into a "pity party" by humans.

The renewing of the mind is God "retooling" our souls to learn a new language--the language of LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS so that we may discover “the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God” in every corner of our being.

This language speaks only in terms of light and NO darkness.

This language speaks only in terms of life and NO death.

This language speaks only in terms of love and NO wrath.

Ready to learn it? Fluently? Fully?

If so, we must renounce death as our first and primary language. No death spoken here! Death is now a dead language. We will not speak of death. We will not think of death. We will not honor death.

Death is now a foreign language we no longer accept as our native tongue. Whatever physical death may or may not be, it’s not final, it’s not eternal, and it’s certainly not the end. It’s the penultimate tipping point into oceanic promotion.

L'Chaim! To Life!

Chapter Twelve

Moses showed us an image of a God.

Moses showed us an image of a God who, on occasion, will "REJOICE OVER YOU TO DESTROY YOU, AND TO BRING YOU TO NOUGHT" (literally "annihilation").

In Deuteronomy 28:63, 15-68, Moses quotes God verbatim as claiming to take "delight" in destroying us with curse-casting, child-deforming, food-poisoning, asset-crushing, pestilence-cleaving, fever-afflicting, sword-smiting, crotch-burning, rain-depriving, enemy-supporting, famine-falling, leprosy-spreading, insanity-inserting, blindness-bringing, depression-delivering, heart-crippling, infertility-infecting, poverty-punishing, war-waging, and cannibal-causing.

Jesus, by contrast, showed us a heroically seamless image of God which was so much better, higher, truer, deeper, and finer than was Moses' view. His Abba was revealed as a God who delights NOT to smite and destroy us, but RATHER to inhabit and edify us.

Jesus' upgraded view of God presents
us with a light-bearing, love-churning,
passion-burning, prodigal-accepting, sickness-purging,
wholeness-bringing, evil-evicting, and devil-defanging
champion of valor, vivaciousness, and virtue.

Jesus' view of God is preferable to Moses' view on every level. Moses was a great and meek man. But he had serious anger issues, which kept him from entering the Promised Land.

Moses wasn't God. And he didn't claim to be. Jesus was and did. Let's "move out" of Moses's occasionally bipolar view of God. Let's "move in" Jesus' more internally and externally consistent view of a flawlessly good God.

Chapter Thirteen

Let's not accuse God of unworthy things.

Here is a GREAT example of how reading the Old Testament allegorically keeps us from accusing God of unworthy things.

Let's start from this wonderful New Testament notion:

> "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world ."
>
> James 1:27

Here is the starting point. NOTHING draws God's protective concern more than exiled women and abandoned children--- so much so, in fact, that the very definition of real religion itself revolves around this concern.

Now, in the Old Testament, we see in the story of Abraham an episode that appears to COMPLETELY contradict and disprove God's concern for abandoned women and children. In this episode, Abraham, to satisfy the apparent wishes of both God and his wife Sarah, CASTS OUT and ABANDONS his mistress Hagar along with their young son Ishmael. Genesis 21.

> "And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread, and a bottle of water, and gave it unto Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs. And she went, and sat her down over against him a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child.' And she sat over against him, and lift up her voice, and wept ."
>
> Genesis 21:14-16

Now, the good news is that God miraculously intervened and saved both Hagar and her child from their desert distress. But, as far as Abraham's actions go, this sets a cruel and crushing precedent-- to exile both woman and child into a wilderness where they were sure to die, all in the name of God.

There is no such type of outlandish conduct EVER divinely sanctioned in the New Testament, commanding such physical abuse and abandonment of woman and child. Now, I realize that God told Abraham He would make Ishmael's seed great, and that this assurance might have helped cauterize Abraham's conscience to be able to do this deed. Nonetheless, OUR Christ-quickened consciences compel us to challenge the realities of this situation IF we decide to read it literally.

If a New Testament believer EVER claimed that God told him to exile both woman and child out into a desolate wilderness and leave them with no future aid or support other than a water bottle and a loaf of bread, then we would loathe that person as a liar who was misrepresenting God's nature. On a strictly external and literal level, Abraham here seems like nothing more than the ultimate "deadbeat" dad who disowned his OWN child, refused to pay ANY form of future child support, and basically left BOTH mother and child to die.

So then, what ARE we to do with this seemingly brutal passage?

Paul's Spirit-quickened solution was simple. He allegorized it. And when he did, all the characters and places named in this recorded event became symbols, which, when rightly understood, represented spiritual dynamics RATHER than humans and their external ethical behaviors. Let's consider Paul's allegorical acumen here in Galatians 4, wherein he explicitly tells us he is allegorizing this event under the inspiration of God. Galatians 4:21-31

Example of Hagar and Sarah

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, 'Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.' Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the slave woman

> and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.' So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman."
>
> Galatians 4:21-31

So, no longer do we read this passage and worry about the apparent dismissive cruelty it attributes to Abraham, Sarah, and God. Instead, we see that Hagar and Sarah, as well as Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion, each symbolically represent conflicting INTERNAL dynamics of death versus life, bondage versus freedom, and legalism versus faith. The only "thing" we are to "cast out" into "the wilderness" is any "thought" or "impulse" which rises up within us which seeks to keep us from knowing our indwelling Christ THROUGH grace, BY faith, and IN the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

Allegory used. Dead-letter defused. God's image purged. Wisdom received. Goodness manifested.

Chapter Fourteen

But God is just!

"Now, Richard don't go overboard with all that 'God is love' nonsense. Before anything else, remember that God is just!"

Well...

God is indeed JUST.

God is "just" love.

God is "just" light.

God is "just" lightness.

God is "just" Jesus.

God "just" overcomes all evil with His all-goodness.

What Jesus never DID, the Father would never DO, and the Spirit isn't now DOING.

Jesus never oppressed.

Jesus never afflicted.

Jesus never killed.

Jesus never refused to help those who came under His immediate sphere of influence.

So, neither would the heavenly Father EVER do these things listed above. And the Spirit isn't NOW doing any of these things either.

"...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." -Acts 10:38.

Part 3

Jesus- The Image Of God

Chapter Fifteen

JESUS IS GOD'S ONLY VOICE

The dark distorting energies of wrath, oppression, condemnation, fear, accusation, vengeance, and hate, which are collectively amalgamated by the term “Satan,” are not God's "angry voice."

The Old Testament saints sometimes thought so.

Jesus knew better.

And so should we.

Jesus is God's only voice.

Hear we Him.

Chapter Sixteen

Jesus, the savior of the entire world.

Do the heart-math.

Do the conscience-math.

Do the hope-math.

Do the Jesus-math.

Jesus is "Salvador Mundi."

The savior of the entire world.

All means all.

Every means every.

Any means any.

The verses below say what they say. Notice the use of "all", “any”, and "everybody." Notice there are no conditions, exceptions, or exclusions given.

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, Who is the Savior of ALL MEN, ESPECIALLY [Greek: "to the greatest degree"] of those who believe. These things command and teach." (1 Tim. 4:9-11). [this passage clearly includes even those who do not believe as being within the ambit of salvation].

"Jesus, was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for EVERYONE." (Heb. 2:9)

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of our God our saviour; Who WILL have ALL men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a ransom for ALL, to be testified in due time." (1 Tim. 2:3-6, KJV).

"He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might GATHER TOGETHER IN ONE ALL THINGS IN CHRIST, BOTH WHICH ARE IN HEAVEN AND

WHICH ARE HEAVEN AND WHICH ARE ON EARTH— IN HIM." (Eph. 1:9-10).

"He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF" (Phil. 3:21).

"EVERY MAN'S work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be BURNED, he shall SUFFER LOSS: but HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; yet so AS BY FIRE." 1 Cor. 3:13-15. (Key passage on the postmortem judgment fire of God, where there is suffering and loss for the errant soul, but ultimately salvation, yes, as by fire).

"For as in Adam ALL DIE, even so in Christ shall ALL BE MADE ALIVE. But EVERY man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put ALL enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put ALL things under his feet. But when he saith, ALL things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put ALL things

under him. And when ALL things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put ALL things under him, that GOD MAY BE 'ALL IN ALL.' Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" 1 Corinthians 15:22-29.

"I heard EVERY creature IN heaven, ON earth, UNDER the earth, ON the sea, and EVERYTHING in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13). (Angels here are included in the restoration-- no creaturely exception.)

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make ALL things new'" (God will dwell with men and he will wipe every tear from their eyes, death, mourning, crying, pain and the old order of things will pass and everything and everybody will be made new. Rev. 21:5, 3-4).

"At the name of Jesus EVERY knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that EVERY tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:10:11).

"ALL Israel will be saved." (Rom. 11:26)

"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for ALL, and therefore ALL died." (2 Cor. 5:14)

"Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation of ALL MEN, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for ALL MEN." (Rom. 5:18)

"And I, if I (Jesus) am lifted up from the earth, will draw ["drag" in the Greek, helkuo] ALL MANKIND unto Myself." (John 12:32).

Read this passage together with "No one can come to Christ unless the Father who sent Him draws him." (John 6:44), and we are left with the unavoidable promise that Jesus WILL draw all men to Himself.

In Jesus Christ is "the restoration of ALL THINGS, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21)

The Gospel is "good tidings of great joy will be to ALL people." (Luke 2:10)

Believers in Christ are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:13)

God appointed Jesus "heir of ALL THINGS, and through whom He made the universe." (Heb. 1:2)

"As God gave Jesus authority over ALL FLESH, that he should give eternal life to as many as God have Him." (John 17:2)

The Father "has given ALL THINGS into Jesus' hands." (John 13:3)

Jesus was "the true light which gives light to EVERY MAN who come into the world." (John 1:9)

"Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation of ALL MEN, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for ALL MEN." (Rom. 5:18)

Jesus is "able even to subdue ALL THINGS to Himself." (Phil. 3:21)

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering towards us, not willing that ANY should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

"God was Christ reconciling THE WORLD to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:19, 20).

Chapter Seventeen

Jesus is the Father's heart.

Jesus isn't just acquainted with the Father's heart. Jesus IS the Father's heart in full blossom.

Jesus didn't come to turn the Father's heart back toward us, but to reveal that His Abba's heart has NEVER been turned away from us.

Jesus didn't come to change the Father's mind but to reveal it.

Chapter Eighteen

Jesus never drowned babies.

Jesus never drowned babies. He never slit human throats. He never sent down fire to melt human flesh. He never injected plagues into those who rejected Him.

All He did was comfort and cure all who are lost, hungry, sick, and sad.

That's about it.

Chapter Nineteen

Get To Know The Son Better.

If we get to know the Son better, we will get to know the Father better.

During His incarnation, Jesus didn't go around afflicting, oppressing, infecting, terrorizing, or gassing people. He wasn't even judging them. The only judgments Jesus unleashed were against the dark works of the fallen powers, which were harming humanity.

As for humanity, Jesus ministered spontaneous forgiveness, deliberate non-judgement, curative wonders, restorative miracles, and death-defying deliverances.

It's good to always remember "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." - Acts 10:38

Chapter Twenty

Jesus' image is the cosmic "Rosetta Stone."

"And he (Jesus) said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.'" John 1:51

What a mystically spectacular passage!

Jesus is Jacob's ladder upon whom all sorts of "divine messaging" keep traveling through and upon.

Jesus is the superconductor of divine energies that flow from the Father through Him with absolutely no carnal resistance. His total submission to the Father's heroic will is what made Jesus great.

Jesus' image is the cosmic "Rosetta Stone" for interpreting all reality, all Scripture, and all virtue.

When we dare and care to devotedly meditate on Jesus, our better angels are instantly loosed within us to fly about in our minds and hearts, healing all oppression and bringing brilliance to our being.

The golden "image bank" Jesus offers us makes Fort Knox look like a lemonade stand.

The image may be Jesus, the Son of Man. It may be Jesus, the Son of God.

It may be Jesus kneeling and washing the feet of the lowliest of men. It may be Jesus seated at the right hand of the Most High Father.

It may be Jesus painfully dying on the Cross. It may be Jesus joyfully rising out of His tomb.

It may be Jesus daringly descending into Hell. It may be Jesus peacefully ascending into Heaven.

It may be Jesus mending the broken lives of fallen men. It may be Jesus breaking open the gates of Hell.

It may be Jesus hidden in the life of Moses as his rod of power that supernaturally budded new life.

It may be Jesus hidden in the Garden of Eden as the Tree of Life itself.

It may be Jesus symbolized by the mysterious Melchizedek, the great King and High Priest of Salem, who eternally blessed Father Abraham.

And, again, it may be Jesus symbolized by Jacob's Ladder upon which angels travel up and down between Heaven and Earth.

Jesus' cosmic story is repeatedly imbedded, allegorized, and highlighted at various points in the whole Old Testament: the Passover story, the Exodus journeys of the Israelites, the Psalms of David, the contents of the Ark of the Covenant, the adventures and mighty acts of the Judges, the covenantal ceremonies of Abraham, the Wells of Isaac, the blessings of Jacob's sons, the building of the Tabernacle and the Temple, the conquering of the Promise Land, etc.

If we will but let Him, Jesus will beautify and de-weaponize all harsh-sounding passages by cracking open their hard shells and revealing the soft and tender Christological manna embedded within.

There is hardly a Scripture in the Old Testament that doesn't point to Christ in some way--- a few literally, but most allegorically. So, we must stop reading the Bible looking for ANYTHING or ANYBODY other than Jesus. And we must stop processing reality without looking for ANYTHING or ANYBODY other than Jesus. When we do, we THEN will walk in perfect love and light toward all people.

Chapter Twenty-One

The Scriptures don't define Jesus.

The Scriptures don't define Jesus. Jesus defines Scriptures.

Jesus' nature alone carries the "tonal tenderness" necessary to hear His Abba's heart concerning Scripture's fuller meaning.

Jesus is the sole "Rosetta Stone" that translates the Scriptures' better and brighter meanings.

Jesus is the sole remover of the carnal "veil" which blocks humanity from understanding Scripture as they ought.

Jesus, through His Spirit who now indwells us, is the sole catalyzing agent that activates the spiritual illumination of Scriptures.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Here is why we worship Jesus.

Here is why we worship Jesus. NOT because it pleases HIS ego. NOT because it repays HIM. NOT because we are performing for HIM.

HERE is why we worship Jesus.

God is light.

God is love.

God is lightness of being.

We become what we worship.

We grow to resemble what we cherish.

Worship is for OUR benefit, not His.

It's about US growing in Christ.

Jesus' virtues are constituent elements of His essence. These strands of goodness are seamlessly weaved into the cloak of His internal and eternal being.

When we worship Jesus, our consciousness becomes weaved into the Trinitarian tapestry of His seamless cloak.

WE are the true beneficiaries of worship. God just longs to share His intimacies of "being" with us. We feel His ongoing pleasure toward us and others. We blend and bond with the unifying power of His love.

In His embrace, we experience ten thousand charms of His kindness, gentleness, and tenderness.

Worship elevates our senses and sensibilities into the limitless energies of eternity.

What's not to love?

Jesus' four love letters to us all.

Love God.

Love neighbor.

Love self.

Love enemy.

Notice anything?

A love without exception or exclusion.

What's not to love?

Who's not to love?

Nothing.

Nobody.

Jesus fills all in all.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Mercy triumphs over judgment.

The older I get, the more convinced I am that Jesus didn't come to save us from God's judgment, but from our own.

Jesus came to save us from our own toxic judgment--towards others and ourselves. Satan, as the slithering serpent whispering in our inner ear, lures us to judge EVERYTHING and EVERYBODY. But if we will but open our gates, Jesus will drown those venomous whispers by flooding us with His oceanic mercy.

> "Mercy triumphs over judgment." James 2:13.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Want to get blown away?

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!" Luke 23:34.

Want to get blown away?

A little-known secret in the above passage is that Jesus was speaking in the Greek imperative mood.

Jesus was not "asking" the Father to forgive them; He was "commanding" it. And that changes everything we think we know about this passage. Let me give you an example that will open this up for us in a wondrous way.

A child awakes in the middle of the night. The child sees a shadow lurking at the window. A dark stranger has entered the bedroom. The child screams for their father down the hall.

Now stop! Let's examine the child's mindset. Does the child cry, "Dad, will you please help me?"; or does the child exclaim, "Dad, I wish you would help me!"Or does the child scream, "Dad might help me if he is in a good mood!" Do any of these statements accurately reflect the child's true attitude toward the father?

No! No trusting child would speak in any of the above-described ways about a loving father. The child would never have to cajole, beg, wish, or wonder about his father's willingness to help him. The child knows the father's nature is always ready, willing, and able to help in times of peril. The child would shout in authoritative tones, "Dad, help me!"

This tone of command is not based on the child's confidence in himself, but rather in the dad's character. The child knows the father's love will always come - no exceptions. In fact, it is unthinkable to the child that their father would ever fail to come speedily.

The child is indeed commanding the father to help. However, the child is not commanding from a sense of superiority over the father, but rather is commanding from a sense of security with their father. The child's

security is not based on a "spoiled brat" mentality that "Daddy will give me anything and everything I want."

The child's security is instead based on what their father has already provided - love, nurturing, tenderness, sacrifice, friendship, protection, joy, and wisdom. The child simply knows the father too well to doubt His will to be an ever-present help in time of need. The child knows that there is no reluctance in the father's heart to save from any dark intruders' evil designs.

If earthly children can have this mindset toward their fathers, how much more, more, more should we spiritual children be able to foster and develop this attitude toward our Heavenly Father.

There are always dark intruders stalking our souls, seeking to rob, kill, and destroy every good thing in our lives. Sometimes the dark intruder is our own rebellious flesh seeking to revive lust and pride in our lives. Sometimes the dark intruder is a devilish dynamic seeking to defile us with sin, sickness, or accusation. Still other times, the dark intruders can be others operating in fleshly or devilish energies.

The point is that we are always in peril. Therefore, we should always have the same mindset that the child used in calling on the father to save them. We should be able to say in complete confidence, "Abba-Father, help me!"

We have, after all, received a spirit which cries, "Abba-Father" (Gal. 4:6). Abba is an Aramaic term of endearment, akin to "daddy," by which a faithful son refers to a beloved father. This heart-cry is based on knowing the character and nature of God the Father as always and only good.

Our Abba is our hero who lovingly hefts us up on His mighty shoulders and proudly carries us through all trials and tribulations we face. Jesus always had this same view of the Heavenly Father.

Jesus lived hoisted on Abba's shoulders at all times and in all places. He commanded the power of His Father because His Father's love always already commanded Him.

Let me say this clearly and precisely. Jesus' intimate and working knowledge of His Father's absolute goodness enabled Him to brim with confidence in, toward, and through any situation.

So, at Jesus' most painful moment on the Cross, He too used the imperative mood to order mercy on all: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!" Lk. 23:34.

Jesus spoke this from the cross in the same imperative mood as the child who saw the evildoer in his room. Did He command His Fathers's forgiveness from the cross?

Yes, but remember, only in the same way the child cried in the imperative, “Dad, help me!”

Jesus saw the satanic energies that hovered over all humanity, the dark intruder in the room, in other words. So, He, like the boy, cried out Abba, forgive them ("forgiveness" in the Greek literally means "to deliver from"). "Abba, deliver them from sin and all destructive and devilish energies!"

Jesus only commanded this statement to the Father because He was secure and sure that this was already the Father’s heart toward all of us. To pray in the imperative is merely to recognize the immediate urgency of our non-stop need to call, “Abba-Father, help me!”

Only with this intimate understanding of God’s nature can the magnificence of the following verse be properly grasped: “Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my children, and concerning the work of my hands command me.” Is. 45:11.

Children who intimately and steadfastly know their Father God’s goodness CAN command Him concerning all creation. We are only commanding out of us what our knowledge of God’s heroic love has already commanded across the eternities.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Satan's earthquakes vs Jesus' earthquakes.

Riddle: How do you tell the difference between Satan's earthquakes and Jesus' earthquakes?

Answer: Satan's earthquakes have live people to fall into open crevices and DIE.

Jesus' earthquakes have dead people rise out of open crevices and LIVE. (Mt 27:51-53)

When Jesus died, there was a violent earthquake, and the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom. The Bible says tombs were opened and many bodies of saints arose from the dead. It says that after Jesus' resurrection, they went into Jerusalem, where many people witnessed their return to life.

And in three days, Jesus followed them. He is all about life-- life-affirming, life-restoring, life-enriching, life-protecting. Acts 10:38, John 10:10, Luke 4:18-21.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Saul and Paul.

Saul (Pharisee of Tarsus) was a Biblical literalist who weaponized Scriptures to justify killing. Saul beat the plowshare of Scripture into a sword of wrath.

Paul (apostle of Christ) was a Biblical allegorist who spiritualized Scriptures to reveal Jesus. Paul molded the sword of Scripture into a plowshare of peace.

Same person— different sensibilities, different season, different spirit, different hermeneutic.

Saul worshiped the Book. Paul worshipped the Christ.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Jesus is the very conscience of God.

When we read the Old Testament, we must remember that Jesus is the very conscience of God.

This living conscience approves, disapproves, or improves all our thoughts and perceptions with regard to any passage.

Jesus is the master translator of the Lord's nature and wisdom. And He is a live-in translator, always abiding and available in our thought life.

As Paul said, we have the mind of Christ. And nowhere is this more needed than when we read Scripture, especially the Old Testament.

Good reading both sensitizes and stimulates the conscience of the reader to penetrate the deeper issues of the text with epiphany, imagination, and intuition.

Bad reading, by contrast, desensitizes and de-stimulates the conscience of the reader to stay shallow and mindlessly subservient to the surface of the text, i.e., flat and "dead-letter" text reading cauterizes the conscience and neuters the imagination.

Sometimes a pristine conscience "rejoices" in what is written. Other times, a pristine conscience "rebels" against what is written. Still other times, a pristine conscience "evolves" or "beautifies" what is written.

When it comes to Scriptures, here is the first and best truth to remember: Jesus IS the pristine conscience of God.

Moreover, this conscience is a Spirit-presence who NOW lives and pulsates within us to help guide us into all truth.

As the church father Origen once said, "the chamber of justice IS the Spirit-illuminated conscience of man."

Let's resolve then to keep our consciences centered on Christ, tenderized with lovingkindness, fervent in forgiveness, clean with joy, and active with awe. THEN will we read Scripture in the right tone and texture.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Behold the wrath of God!

It was revealed from Heaven amongst Jesus' last few words spoken from the Cross.

"You forgive them Father (in the Greek imperative mood no less) for they don't know what they are doing."

Feel smitten yet? And by smitten, I mean forgiven. And loved as never before.

THIS, THIS, THIS is "the wrath of the (tender) Lamb" the book of Revelation speaks of!

Maybe it's time to slow our roll, breathe deep, catch our breath, and let the love and tenderness of God sink in fully.

No more cringing from God's wrath. It's all about the eternal embrace of everlasting energy and empathy.

Let's all heroically hug it out with God and each other.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

It would have been so easy.

It would have been so easy. So very easy.

If Jesus wanted to make it crystal clear for all Christians today that His Father directly pulverizes men, women, and children in His holy wrath, ALL He had to do was to demonstrate it during His incarnation.

To prove His Heavenly Father was capable of:

—killing
—oppressing
—afflicting
—smiting

—plaguing
—disastering

...all Jesus had to do was:

—stone (by participation or sanction) one person caught in adultery or sabbath breaking
—afflict one evil sinner with a plague
—strike one hypocritical Pharisee dead
—oppress one double-minded person with an evil spirit in order to punish them
—afflict one person with a crippling accident, causing them paraplegia, so that they would thereafter learn humility and give God all the glory for their misfortune
—sent one lightning storm, tornado, mudslide, or tsunami to wipe out particularly hard-hearted villages or cities.

Had Jesus done any of these things, even just one time, then anybody who dared claim otherwise would be forever proven wrong.

But He didn't. Jesus never killed, not once. In fact, He rebuked James and John when they suggested calling down fire and killing the Samaritans for refusing to receive them. He told the two bloodthirsty disciples they "know not what spirit they are of," and that He "had come to save, not to kill."

A Samaritan Village Rejects Jesus

> "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them, saying, 'You don't know what spirit you are of. I came to save human life, not destroy it.' And they went on to another village."
>
> Luke 9:51-56

Jesus' life was described in this way:

> By the Apostle Peter, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

Acts 10:38

> By the Apostle John, "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."
>
> 1 John 1:5

> By the Apostle James, "Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow."
>
> James 1:13-17

So, does Jesus speak always FOR and AS the nature and will of God in all things? Is it fair to say that what Jesus would ALWAYS do (i.e., heal and protect), along with

what Jesus would NEVER do (i.e., oppress and afflict), likewise means the Father will do the same?

Oh yes! Two passages cry out this terrific truth.

> *"grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He (Christ) has made Him the (Father) known. - John 1:17-18.*

> *"Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-all things were created through him and for him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that IN EVERYTHING HE MIGHT BE PREEMINENT. For in Him all THE FULNESS OF GOD WAS PLEASED TO DWELL, and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."*
>
> Colossians 1:15-20

So, since Jesus NEVER once did (or endorsed) any of these things, we can only conclude that He refused to misrepresent the divine nature as anything other than curative, protective, rehabilitative, and restorative. We should likewise steadfastly refuse to malign God's pristine nature. It's the key to everything— "the RENEWING of OUR MIND to the GOOD, acceptable, and perfect WILL OF GOD." Romans 12:2.

Here ends the lesson: If Jesus would never do it in the New Testament, the Father never did it in the Old Testament, and the Spirit will never do it in the NOW testament of our lives.

Chapter Thirty

Jesus had nothing to prove.

Want to hear a secret?

Jesus was not a self-referential speaker. He didn't talk about Himself, especially His human self. We never hear from Him about His carpentry experiences, constant recounting who He had previously healed or helped, how much He loved Himself, His family dynamics, His personal history growing up, etc.

On occasion, He referred to His own divinity, but not overtly, and always in a way that the listeners had to have "ears to hear" to even get what He was really saying. He didn't walk around jamming His charming personality

down people's throats. We actually don't know much about Jesus' human personality from just the written text.

But more than this, Jesus often actually discouraged others from sharing the personal miracles He did for them. Who does THAT today?! Jesus' reticence to self-reference, self-congratulate, or self-promote is called by theologians THE MESSIANIC SECRET, which is Jesus' repeated tendency to keep His miracles private just between Him and the receiver.

In the New Testament, Jesus commands silence in many instances. An example is Mark 8:29-30: "And he asked them, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered and said to Him, 'You are the Christ.' And he charged them that they should tell no man of him." Jesus also issues commands of silence after miracles and healings, e.g. in Mark 1:43–45 in the cleansing of a leper: "After sternly warning him he sent him away at once, saying to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'"

The messianic secret can be found in the Gospels of Matthew (Matthew 8:3-4; Matthew 9:29-31; Matthew 12:15-16; Matthew 17:9) and Luke (Luke 4:41; Luke 8:56; Luke 9:21).

Mark, however, used the messianic secret to organize his story around the progressive revelation of the person of Christ and the messianic consciousness of the

disciples. Demons demonstrated that they recognized Jesus immediately: “I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24-25, Mark 1:34; Mark 3:11-12; Mark 5:6-8; Mark 9:20 NIV); nevertheless, Jesus suppressed their confession.

Jesus often (not always) prohibited public profession by those who experienced miraculous healing (Mark 1:43; Mark 5:43; Mark 7:36; Mark 8:26). The parables of Jesus were offered in order to keep “outsiders” from learning the secret (Mark 4:11-12). Even the disciples, once they related that they understood the “mystery of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11), were sworn to silence (Mark 8:30; Mark 9:9).

Why did Jesus want to keep His miracles a secret?

I think Jesus wants us to abandon our "verbal diarrhea." We ruin everything by over-speaking, over-promoting, and over-selling. We instead jam our own personality and promotion over the situation, which completely dries up the spontaneity of the Spirit to manifest.

Nobody did this more than Peter. He started making himself the issue, his strong personality seeking to actually keep Jesus from going to the Cross. Jesus' response? He called Peter "Satan" and told him his heart was set on the things of men rather than the things of God.

Perhaps we all need a little more mystery and secretiveness in our walk. This allows our private faith

to breathe and manifest. Our personality, self-promotion, self-congratulation, and self-referencing keep the Holy Spirit from manifesting in the moment.

Jesus was always about the NOW. He had nothing to prove or explain. He just MANIFESTED the presence of God. All anybody needed to know about Him was evident BECAUSE of the Spirit exuding from Him. Perhaps, too, the less we boast in ourselves, the better-positioned we then will be to hear the promptings of His Spirit.

Chapter Thirty-One

Of what spirit?

Sadly, some people actually think Jesus continues to judge and destroy and penally punish those who displease Him with wrath.

People who think this often don't know what spirit they are of. Jesus said this when His disciples wanted to call down wrathful fire to destroy the Samaritans for not receiving them.

> "And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are

> of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village."
>
> Luke 9:54-55

So what exactly did Jesus say about whether He came to judge us or not?

"You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on NOBODY." Jesus in John 8:15

"As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did NOT come to judge the world, but to SAVE it." Jesus in John 12:47

"I judge NO man." Jesus in John 8:15.

"The Father judges NO man, but has committed all judgment unto the Son" Jesus in John 5:22

"Now IS the JUDGMENT of this WORLD; now the RULER of this world will be cast out." Jesus in John 12:31

"the ruler of this world IS judged." Jesus in John 16:11

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." 1 John 3:8

So it appears that the only judgment Jesus exercised HERE was against all satanic energies which have deceived, debilitated, and deformed us.

Jesus robustly confirmed this in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus instructs us to "THEREFORE, BE PERFECT, EVEN AS YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS PERFECT." The "therefore" links this verse to the previous 10 verses to define what actually IS the Father's perfection.

The FATHER'S PERFECTION described in Matthew 5:38-48 lies in this:

- He loves His enemies,
- He blesses His enemies who curse Him,
- He does good to those who hate Him,
- He sends rain on the just and unjust alike,
- He sends light on both the good and the evil,
- He prays for those who despitefully use Him, and finally,

He doesn't resist evil by returning it WITH evil, but rather endlessly turns the other cheek, walks the extra mile, gives the extra garment, and in so doing overcomes ALL evil with good.

Chapter Thirty-Two

Jesus cleansed the temple so...

Here is a little-known fact.

AFTER Jesus cleared the Temple of the den of religious thieves and profiteers, look at WHO and WHAT immediately took their place.

The "blind and lame" came into the Temple courts and "He healed them all" (Matthew 21:14). Then, a large group of "children" came and saw the healings and started "crying in the Temple, and saying Hosanna to the son of David." (Matthew 21:15-16).

Jesus rejoiced at this and called what these children did "perfect praise." The point is that Jesus "cast out" the

faithless, felonious, and fruitless elements present in the Temple courts SO THAT they could be replaced with elements of fruitful faith and fervent worship.

This passage says that ALL there, including the chief priests and scribes, saw "the wonderful things that He did" (Matthew 21:15).

This whole episode, then, is hardly a mandate for KILLER JESUS, is it? No, when we read the context of what REALLY happened here, we see it was a wonderful healing and worship revival rather than some sort of bloodbath where Jesus is beating and brutalizing people.

But, because our wrathful eyes are so trained to focus on violence, we take Jesus' actions totally out of context and ignore the "perfect praise" and "healing" ministry that resulted from Jesus' actions. The Matthew 21:1-17 version of events makes no mention EVER of anybody being harmed. It is as simple as that.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Jesus is the Savior of the world.

JESUS CHRIST: SALVADOR MUNDI (THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD)

APOCATASTASIS: the eventual reconciliation of all living things to Christ (Acts 3:21).

"The Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14)

Jesus is "the Christ, the Savior of the world." (John 4:42)

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of our God our saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ

Jesus: Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Tim. 2:3-6, KJV)

Jesus "is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

Jesus "did not come to judge the world but to save the WORLD." (John 12:47)

"Jesus, was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for EVERYONE." (Heb. 2:9)

"Love NEVER fails." (1 Cor. 13:8)

"With God NOTHING is impossible." (Luke 1:37)

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, Who is the Savior of ALL MEN, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach." (1 Tim. 4:9-11)

"At the name of Jesus EVERY knee should bow, of those in heaven, and those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that EVERY tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:10:11)

"God was pleased to have all fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself ALL THINGS on

earth or in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation." (Col. 1:19, 21, 22)

In Jesus Christ is "the restoration of ALL THINGS, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21)

The Gospel is "good tidings of great joy will be to ALL people." (Luke 2:10)

Believers in Christ are "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:13)

God appointed Jesus "heir of ALL THINGS, and through whom He made the universe." (Heb. 1:2)

"No one can come to Christ unless the Father who sent Him draws him." (John 6:44)

"As God gave Jesus authority over ALL FLESH, that he should give eternal life to as many as God have Him." (John 17:2)

The Father "has given ALL THINGS into Jesus' hands." (John 13:3)

Jesus "was the true light which gives light to EVERY MAN who come into the world." (John 1:9)

"Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation of ALL MEN, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for ALL MEN." (Rom. 5:18)

Jesus is "able even to subdue ALL THINGS to Himself." (Phil. 3:21)

Jesus came "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times he might gather together in one ALL THINGS in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works ALL THINGS according to the counsel of His will." (Eph. 1:10, 11)

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

"God was Christ reconciling THE WORLD to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God." (2 Cor. 5:19, 20)

"ALL the nations shall be blessed." (Gal 3:8)

"The Bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives Life to the WORLD." (John 6:33)

Jesus commanded us to be like Himself and His Father: "Love your enemies, bless those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:44, 45)

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw (drag in the Greek, helkuo) ALL MANKIND unto Myself." (John 12:32)

"Creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope, because creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:20, 21)

"The Father loves the Son and has given ALL THINGS into His hands." (John 3:35)

"Since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam ALL died, even so in Christ ALL shall be made alive." (1 Cor. 15:22)

Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the first born over ALL CREATION. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities

or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him." (Co. 1:15, 16)

"ALL shall know the Lord, from the least of them to the greatest of them." (Heb. 8:11)

"The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to ALL MEN." (Titus 2:11)

We are not to "repay evil for evil." (Rom. 12:17)

"If anyone's work which he has built endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved yet so as through fire." (1 Cor. 3:14, 15)

"Of Him and through Him and to Him are ALL THINGS, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36)

"ALL Israel will be saved." (Rom. 11:26)

"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for ALL, and therefore all died." (2 Cor. 5:14)

"The head of EVERY man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3)

"ALL nations shall come and worship You, for your judgments have been made manifested." (Rev. 15:4)

"When God's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the WORLD will learn righteousness." (Isaiah 26:9)

"Mercy shall TRIUMPH OVER (exalt over) judgment." (James 2:13)

"Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." (Rom. 5:20)

"EVERY CREATURE which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever." (Rev. 5:13)

If we REALLY knew the Lord, we "would not have condemned the guiltless." (Matt. 12:7)

"God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning EVERY MAN and teaching EVERY MAN man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." (Col. 1: 27, 28)

"ALL nations whom God has made will come and worship before Him" (Psalm 86:9)

God's "mercy endures forever." (1 Chron. 16:34)

God's Spirit "will be poured out on ALL FLESH." (Joel 2:28)

God beckons us: "Come, and let us return to the Lord, for He has torn, but He will heal us. He has stricken, but

He will bind us. After 2 days, He will revive us. On the THIRD DAY He will raise us up that we may live in His sight." (Hosea 6:1, 2)

"The Lord had made bare His Holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and ALL the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God." (Isaiah 52:10)

"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and ALL FLESH shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken." (Isaiah 40:5)

God will "open His hand and satisfy the desire of EVERY living thing." (Psalm 145:16)

God is "gracious in ALL His works." (Psalm 145:17)

"The EARTH is the Lord's and ALL its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein." (Psalm 24:1)

"ALL the kings of the earth shall praise you, 0 Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth." (Psalm 138:4)

God "reveals Himself by those who did not ask for Him: He was found by those who did not seek Him." (Isaiah 65:1)

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to ALL, and His tender mercies are over ALL His works. ALL your works shall praise you, 0 Lord." (Psalm 145:8-10)

"ALL the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and ALL the families of the nations shall worship before You. ALL those who go down to the dust (death) shall bow before You." (Psalm 22:27, 29)

"0 You Who hear prayer, to you ALL flesh will come. Iniquities prevail against me; as for our transgressions, you will provide atonement for them." (Psalm 65:2-4)

"Through the greatness of your power your enemies shall submit themselves to you. ALL the earth shall worship You and sing praises to you." (Psalm 66:3, 4)

"Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions FAIL NOT. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness." (Lam. 3:21-24)

"The Lord will NOT cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His > mercies." (Lam. 3:31, 32)

"For I will not contend forever, Nor will I always be angry; For the spirit would fail before Me, And the souls which I have made." (Isaiah 57:16)

"There is no God besides Me, a just God and Savior; There is none besides Me. Look to Me and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that

to me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him. In the Lord ALL the descendants of Israel shall be justified and shall glory." (Isaiah 45:21-25)

"In this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all people a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees. And he shall destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over ALL nations. He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces." (Isaiah 25:6-8)

"ALL the nations of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 18:18)

"ALL the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 12:3, 28:14)

"It shall come to pass the saying that is written: `death is swallowed up in victory. Oh, death, where is your sting Oh, Hell (Hades) where is your victory.' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:54-58)

Of those who crucified Him (which is all of us), Jesus declared: "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

"It is finished." (John 19:30)

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (John 1:1, Mark 20:31)

He was crucified, buried, and rose again on the third day. (Acts 2:23; 4:10)

Jesus Christ's blood was shed for the remission of sins. (Matt. 26:8)

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of our God our saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Tim. 2:3-6, KJV)

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"ALL the kings of the earth shall praise you, 0 Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth." (Psalm 138:4)

God "reveals Himself by those who did not ask for Him: He was found by those who did not seek Him." (Isaiah 65:1)

Chapter Thirty-Four

Our spiritual lawyer.

We all need a spiritual lawyer. We all have a spiritual lawyer. Jesus is called our "advocate" in 1 John 2:1.

Jesus is our spiritual lawyer, always informing us of our perpetual privileges of illuminative love.

Jesus is our wise counselor, always on retainer to read our circumstances and offer us light by which to read reality righteously.

So let's always "lawyer up" before "laying down" a bad confession about God's nature drawn from a hastily read passage of Scripture.

The early church father Origen believed all Scripture must be vigorously "cross examined" by the nature of Jesus.

The gleaned truth will then come from the "witness stand" as the passage is made to testify to Jesus as the love-only and light-only nature of God.

Chapter Thirty-Five

If Jesus wouldn't do it...

Did God “REALLY" tell Moses to “surely stone” a poor man to death JUST for picking up sticks on the Sabbath?

Of course not. If our mind’s eye can’t envision Jesus ever commanding such a killing act, then we mustn’t envision the Father or Spirit ever commanding it either.

Jesus is the ONLY full, final, and authoritative revelation of the nature and character of God the Father. So, suppose we CANNOT perceive with our Spirit-quickened consciences Jesus acting as a killer or destroyer. In that case, we can't see God the Father or God the Spirit as a killer or destroyer either, even if the Old Testament’s "dead letter" says otherwise.

So, let's take a look at this:

> "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses."
>
> Numbers 15:32-36

The above passage quotes God as directly commanding Moses to "surely put this man to death" for merely picking up sticks on the Sabbath. The Holy Spirit within me (and many others) doesn't bear witness that Jesus (who is the same God yesterday, today, and forever) would EVER give such a command.

In fact, in John 8, Jesus PREVENTED the stoning of the woman caught in adultery. This, despite the fact that the same law literally demanded her death as it did the

Sabbath breaker (Leviticus 20:10). Jesus revealed Himself to us as our rescuer from Satanic stonings, not their cause. Rest assured, Satan (regardless of whether we view the devil as a dark angel or rather as a dark dynamic) supports each and every stoning of each and every sinner. Jesus does not.

Now, did the stoning in this passage literally happen? I have no problem saying it did. BUT, are we legalistically bound to its “by the letter" literal description of the event? Moses certainly "thought" he was hearing "God" say to "surely kill" the man who merely picked up sticks. But, did he hear the Lord accurately, or was something distorting Moses' understanding of the divine will?

If Moses erroneously thought, as Jewish theology tells us, that Satan was God's "angry voice," God’s official and obedient minister of wrath, “the left hand of God” in other words, who is merely and obediently carrying out the Father's directives, something WE now know to be wrong, then how might that affect our interpretation of this passage?

The Old Testament, on at least one occasion, uses the two terms “the anger of the Lord” and “the provocation of Satan” interchangeably (see 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1). This passage contains the clarion clue that unlocks the drastically different cosmologies of the Old and New Testaments.

In the Old Testament, God and Satan are presented as two cooperating facets of the same being. Only in the New Testament do the images of Satan and God become fully sundered, separated, and disjointed from each other. Simply put, the natures and motives of God and Satan became uncoupled and antagonistic. Jesus came to fully differentiate the images of God and Satan.

This is what Jesus meant when He declared that He "saw Satan fall from Heaven." Jesus was describing His prophetic perception that all satanic qualities, which had been wrongly attributed and wrathfully projected onto His Father by human error, were now falling away from the heavenly image of God.

So, here is the interpretive key. When Moses quoted God, Moses wrongly included in his functional definition of God BOTH Yahweh AND Satan. So, if Satan were wrathfully speaking this to Moses' heart, Moses would have attributed it as coming from God. And Moses would have been wrong.

We now know from the upgraded teachings of the New Testament that the oppressions sinners sometimes reap in the wake of their sins come NOT from "the anger of God" but rather from "the provocations of Satan." This difference makes all the difference. When Paul exhorts us in Ephesians "to give no place to the devil," this is the very dark and destructive dynamic against which he is warning us.

So what do we do with these types of passages? Simply put, we have to let the Holy Spirit redivide the Old Testament passage to comport with the character of Jesus. If Jesus were physically standing by Moses that day, would He have just stood there and said, "Go ahead Moses, surely kill him." Or, would Jesus have done the same thing He did for the woman caught in adultery, the same thing He does for us today--- saved him, not condemned him, then exhorted him to go forth and sin no more. I think the answer is pretty clear.

The Holy Spirit is the key. Always remember, 2 Corinthians 3:6 says we are "ABLE minsters of the New Covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life."

The upgraded picture of God Jesus ushered in reveals the divine nature as a life-giver, NOT a life-taker. Jesus never commanded stonings. Jesus' steadfast posture in the Gospels was against stonings, not for them.

Jesus' mindset was to defuse stonings, not accuse them.

Jesus spoke for God.

Jesus spoke from God.

Jesus spoke as God.

Let's track with Jesus' love here by renouncing physical, mental, emotional, and verbal stonings of all kinds:

—social (and social media) stonings

—cultural stonings

—theological stonings

—racial stonings

—gender based stonings.

We mustn't let ourselves be recruited into others' hate-fests. Hive-minded hate is humanity's worst moment.

Our words can be rocks.

Our thoughts can be rocks.

Our tones can be rocks.

Our emotions can be rocks.

Let's disarm ourselves with the kindness and love of Christ. Instead of hastily and hatefully hurling jagged epithets at others for "picking up sticks," let's instead focus on "laying down rocks".

Chapter Thirty-Six

t takes Spiritual Jesus to explain Scriptural Jesus.

Only Jesus is INERRANT and INFALLIBLE. Humanity… not so much.

So, if Jesus' indwelling Spirit is NOT the one translating ALL the meanings of the Scriptures:

--their tones,

--their truths,

--their allegories,

--their symbols,

--their occasional misrepresentations about God's nature,

—their occasional distortions due to the human writers' own wrath being projected onto God,

--their beauties,

--their mysteries,

--their frustrations,

--their exceeding great and precious promises,

THEN our reading of them is not infallible and inerrant.

BUT, there is a better way.

As we sit and contemplate our Bible open on the table before us, let's imagine JESUS is the ONE spiritually leaning over our shoulder, vibrantly speaking into our thoughts.

His right hand is tenderly patting our back while His left hand points out certain passages from which He wants to explain and exhort us. He also patiently redirects us away from other passages that aren't profitable for us right now in our walk. Through all these conscience-quickening experiences, our hearts grow to know His voice better and better and better and better and better.

And THAT is as infallible and inerrant as it gets-- the Lord of Love and Light explaining the truth of Jesus in ALL Scripture. He did it for the Emmaus disciples, and He will do it for us.

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.... They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'....Then Jesus said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be realized.'" - Luke 24:27, 32, 44.

Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to these two highly blessed disciples. And their hearts burned within them as they finally understood the true import of the Old Testament.

It takes God to explain God. It takes Spiritual Jesus to explain Scriptural Jesus. Only He is inerrant and infallible. "Hear Him!" Mark 9:7.

Part 4

The Christ-Life Walk

Chapter Thirty-Seven

FREEDOM FROM CHOICE

What we have is freedom OF choice. What we need is freedom FROM choice.

The treasure beyond measure is to become so wholly integrated into the divine nature of Jesus that we no longer wear ourselves out by endlessly striving to make the right daily choices.

Instead, Jesus' Spirit has become so seamlessly weaved into our being that we no longer suffer with cursed self-consciousness. We have transcended "the heaviness of choice" (aka self-righteousness) altogether and have entered into "the lightness of being" (aka the righteousness which is from God).

We no longer have to endlessly judge ourselves and our infinite options. Instead, we have entered into the sabbath rest of His lightness of being.

Freedom OF choice wears us out. Freedom FROM choice energizes us to live life without self-doubt, self-condemnation, and paralyzing tentativeness.

When Jesus becomes our indwelling life, we personify His virtue. We don't "choose" our way there. Rather, we allow Him to become the living way in and through us. As Nikolai Berdyaev said, in Christ, "we don't proceed toward being but from it."

Chapter Thirty-Eight

THE NUCLEAR POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Do we REALLY know why it's best to turn the other cheek, walk the extra mile, give the additional coat?

Do we REALLY know why it's better to pray for our enemies and bless those who curse and despitefully use us?

Exactly why are all these things better than "eye-for-an-eye" revenge, "tooth-for-a-tooth" retaliation, and "hate-for-hate" cursing toward those who offend us? See Matthew 5:38-48.

It is not JUST that turning the other cheek keeps us from sinning, although it does. It is not JUST that praying for

our enemies is the noblest thing we can do, although it is. And it is not JUST that blessing those who hate, curse, and despitefully use us makes us Christ-like, although it certainly does.

No, the REASON "loving our enemies" is the best thing we can ever do is that it gives us the maximum POWER to ultimately overcome all their evil for THEIR sake.

Let me put it another way. When somebody victimizes us with condemnation, hatred, cursing, lying, violence, or betrayal, do we know what we then become? We become the most powerful intercessor on earth for that PARTICULAR person.

This is a Spiritual law embedded by God in all creation. Whenever we are wronged, we are AUTOMATICALLY given EXTRA mojo, power, authority, and access to pray blessings and favor UPON the heads of the wrongdoers.

The absolute best blessing we can pray for the enemy we have TRULY forgiven is to fervently and tenderly pray down what Romans calls "coals of cathartic conviction" upon their souls.

These hot coals heat their consciences with the urge and need to repent. I call these "soul-coals." "Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head." Romans 12:20.

An eye-for-an-eye spirit of condemnation, revenge, and resentment against our enemies will HINDER and OBSTRUCT their conviction to repent. But, a turn-the-other-cheek Spirit of love and non-judgment will MAXIMIZE and OPTIMIZE the conditions for their Godly repentance to occur.

Whereas an "eye-for-an-eye" spirit causes us to call down fire on our enemies, just as the misguided disciples did in Luke 9:51-56, the "turn-the-other-cheek" spirit causes us to pity and empathize with our enemies, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34.

Talk about victims' rights!

WE have the increased access and power to help save those who wrong us--- to save them to the uttermost from sin, Satan, and themselves.

God has weaved an invincible dynamic into creation that always gives those who are victimized the most powerful force in the universe to wield at their disposal--- FORGIVENESS.

But biblical "forgiveness" is not just "mercy" to graciously overlook the wrong. Biblical "forgiveness" in the original Greek language means complete "deliverance" for the sinner FROM the bondage to the sin itself.

In other words, "perfect forgiveness" ULTIMATELY works "COMPLETE deliverance." This "power of good"

to ultimately "overcome evil" and thoroughly PURGE evildoers of all sin-bondages works absolutely and without exception.

Sometimes it works quickly. Sometimes it works slowly. Sometimes it works in THIS age. Sometimes it will work in the age to COME. But it ALWAYS works.

In our patience and faith in this Scripturally-promised dynamic, that of overcoming all evil with good, we will truly "possess our souls" as we count it all joy when we are "victimized" by persecutions. Luke 21:19; James 1:2-4.

The reason we can rejoice is that IF and AS we truly forgive, bless, and love our enemies, we are literally "saving them" from the clutches of darkness and destruction.

But, on the other unfortunate hand, our toxic resentment and desire to retaliate against our enemies will only worsen the situation, both ours AND our enemies.

It may well be that there is so little true deliverance FROM sin because there is so little true forgiveness OF sin by those who have been victimized. But, us learning to fully and actively "forgive," JUST AS the Father and Jesus "forgive," is the KEY thing we are now called to realize and walk in.

The strongest intercession FOR particular evildoers potentially comes from those who are victimized BY

those same evildoers. This is why, "Jesus lives to make intercession for them."

We are "them."

Jesus is our champion intercessor BECAUSE He became the champion victim. He turned His cosmic cheek the other way in love rather than retaliate against us in wrath. And because of this, He truly is all-powerful in Heaven and earth. His mercy ransomed us from all evil.

Jesus is easily the MOST victimized person to ever walk the earth. He was completely sinless, yet bore the full brunt of victimization for EVERY sin ever committed. He was victimized by all OUR misguided evildoing in thought, deed, or word.

Our mental, verbal, emotional, and physical violence, all inflicted UPON Jesus at the Cross, gave HIM the most powerful intercessory influence the world has ever seen.

So, even if we fail to fully forgive, we still have a cosmic safety net---- Jesus! Jesus is the savior of the whole world, which in Latin is expressed as "Salvador Mundi." Jesus is the perfect intercessor, and His love shall not fail to eventually overcome and rescue all men trapped in sin. He shall overcome them with His flawless goodness, whether it be in this life or the next.

But, let's not just count on His safety net of mercy to make all things right in some FUTURE age. Let's instead join in the "fray" of forgiveness right HERE and NOW.

As warriors of virtue, let's battle all wrath by learning to "forgive" with a vengeance! When we learn that God's only "vengeance" is to "wholly heal" His enemies, then our hearts will be primed and ready to fight the good fight of faith.

Jubilee in Scripture is just a cathartic and anthemic way of declaring, “This isn't the end of the world (even if it feels like it in some ways). Let’s just all take a deep breath and give each other an everlovin’ break. We have all screwed up one way or another. Everybody needs a periodic do-over and reboot.”

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Bask Don't Beg

Begging God to be merciful is like begging water to be wet.

Let it soak in. Bask, don't beg.

God's perfect love never abandons the imperfect. Ever.

If only we would truly, madly, and deeply let this truth sink in.

Nobody who regularly practices or lapses into "conditional love" can be fully happy.

"Unconditional love", by contrast, brings unconditional joy, even (perhaps especially) to those who are being stoned verbally or physically for their smiling faith in that limitless love.

Conditions breed limits. Limits breed exclusionary hate. Unlove then becomes a hungry hunter in our hearts, seeking to sink its fangs into some excuse to hate or uncare.

Eternal life is the high sense of being found only in unconditional love. Where love is unlimited, life is unlimited— in both quality and duration.

Chapter Forty

God wasn't real to me until Jesus.

God wasn't real to me until.... Jesus.

Jesus ushers in the reality of God to me. He is the inner narrator/author of my best, brightest, and most lucid moments. My senses in these moments are heightened TOWARD Him, my heart is unionized WITH Him, and my thoughts are fixated ON Him.

Friend, husband, Lord, brother, hero, father, mother, and friend. What a God! He is the lover of our souls.

Augustine had it so right. We have a Jesus-shaped vacuum within... until we don't. The Spirit fills the

vacuum. The Spirit is the Lord, and wherever the Spirit is, there is freedom. The Spirit is the revelation of Jesus.

Humanity is in recovery. We are progressively remembering something we have corporately forgotten. We are, and always have been, beloved children of God.

This is why spiritual awareness often feels more like recapturing and remembering a long-lost relationship than newly discovering it.

I can't think of a better epitaph.

"He did not study God; he was dazzled by Him." Victor Hugo, Les Misérables.

Chapter Forty-One

Why evangelize?

The Gospel is a promise, not a threat. It is not a "shotgun wedding" where we enter into covenant with the Lord while staring down the barrel of an eternal threat.

"Believe me, or I will torture you in Hell for eternity." That kind of threat is more likely to result in a forced, panicked, and insincere conversion rather than a heartfelt decision. Certainly, conviction of sin is a big part of conversion, but that is not the same thing as the "or else" threat of Hellish torture for non-compliance.

We do need to know and appreciate the extent of the Lord's rescue over our often Hellish states of being, but it is His goodness that leads us to repentance. It is His countenance of acceptance, light, and love that should

draw our hearts to blossom toward Him. Sure, we feel intense anguish at our own prior sin-condition as part of our conversion, but this is not from the threat of Hell, but rather from the "relief" which Jesus offers from the weight of our own sin.

Promises take us to places threats can never go.

So what's our motive to evangelize? We come to Christ NOW because it drastically improves the quality NOW of our life HERE and NOW.

To think our motive to win souls is to prevent God from torturing them forever after they die (or incinerating them into nothingness through eternal homicide) is pretty abhorrent to me.

We convert and come to God now because He is love and light, and our lives are empty now. He is our loving Abba who seeks our betterment and restoration of relational intimacy TODAY, HERE, NOW, ASAP. And THAT is the good news motive for evangelizing, not the death threat motive.

Chapter Forty-Two

Jesus is the miseltoe of Heaven.

Jesus is the miseltoe of Heaven who hovers over all creation.

As you let your heart's focus sway under His sweet shadow, He gently kisses your soul with a thousand charms. And that's the greatest gift of all.

So be kissed!

Don't pull away.

Lean into it.

"Kiss the Son!" Psalm 2:12.

His atomic kiss fills each day with new and nascent energies. Every day is a rebirth. Merry Christmas, all!

Chapter Forty-Three

Unfurling.

Unfurling may well be the single most important (but least known) spiritual dynamic in understanding how the Kingdom of God operates.

Let me explain.

The Koru is the Maori word that relates to this "unfurling" growing tip of the native Ponga fern. The Koru is said to symbolise emerging life. This is the perfect metaphor for the kingdom of God. It is in a furled state within each of us. Our individual and corporate faith hoists and hastens its unfurling, while our individual and corporate disbelief hinders and husks its unfurling within us.

Christ's kingdom of love, life, and light is already unfurling within each of us at different rates and intensities according to our respective hearts' focus and devotion. Some are richly aware of this unfurling. Some are barely aware of it. Others have not yet perceived it at all. But it is there. "Christ is the true light that lights every human who comes into the world." John 1:9.

Our cooperative devotion waters and fertilizes His kingdom's inner-quickening and unfolding within our sphere of influence, while our lethargy and lukewarmness delay its full blossom. But it can only be delayed, not stopped. Christ's life will eventually sprout, unfurl, and emerge in each of us, whether it's in this age or the age to come.

And not only is this kingdom unfurling progressively within us individually, it is also unfurling within us corporately, as His bride and body. May this metaphor of the Ponga fern help us all to focus on our "growing tip," the very nature of Christ, which is unfurling within us now, even as we speak.

Chapter Forty-Four

Go mystical.

Here is one key to dynamic spiritual growth. Go mystical. Go vertical.

> "What does mysticism really mean? It means the way to attain knowledge. It's close to philosophy, except in philosophy you go horizontally while in mysticism you go vertically."
>
> Elie Wiesel

It's so sad to see so many languish in a horizontal existence where they aren't seeking interaction with God— at all.

Their chins never rise in divine expectation.

Their eyes never lift to the hills of hope.

They never rest their heads on the Lord's chest of curative energies.

Instead, they allow horizontal human reasoning, horizontal human failure, horizontal human hypocrisy, and horizontal human frustration to determine all their beliefs, misbeliefs, and non-beliefs about a voraciously, valiantly, and virtuously vertical God.

I think we could all use a little more verticality.

This Psalm says it all. It is called "A Song of Ascents."

> I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore."
>
> Psalms 121

Divine impulse.

I finally found someone who uses the term "divine impulse" in the same way that I have coined the term-- to explain the divine activity and promptings of the Holy Spirit occurring within our consciences. I feel like I've found a long-lost brother.

> "The incomprehensible God is known through Christ, by faith, rather than by philosophical speculations. He manifests God to us, being the expression of His very being, and through him alone, God can be known. The scriptures reveal Him to those who have faith; and thus we come to know the Holy Spirit as the DIVINE IMPULSE within us."
>
> Michael Servetus, Book VII, Out of the Flames, Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone, Broadway Books, NY, NY, p. 72.

I think the "divine impulse" is embedded but latent even in an unrenewed soul, and in need of a catalyzing event.

John says that Christ lights every human who comes into the world in some way.

Spirit-Baptism, Spirit-infilling, the promise of the Father, Christ-indwelling, etc., are all various names used by different believers to describe this same river-crossing event.

But it's an inward crossing.

To receive Christ is not just receiving a handful of propositions about Jesus, but being ignited and infused with what theologians call His propassions —Jesus' vibrant, healthy, and virtuous mental and emotional states.

We then can deftly discern the promptings of His love-nature and His light-bearing personality.

Even though an unbeliever or young believer, or carnal believer, may not yet rightly or fully recognize, process, relate with, and respond to this Christ-presence, it is nonetheless there waiting to be catalyzed by our faith-reception of it, what Paul called in Galatians and Romans the "hearing of faith."

When we say yes and amen to His inner presence, the husks/bushels/shells in our soul which have previously encased, denied, obstructed, distorted, or ignored that deeply embedded presence within us NOW begin to be shucked off of us.

It is an ongoing process of growth and guidance. This allows His indwelling to then be kinetically outflowing, renewing our minds and hearts in the process, while shedding abroad to others the light and love of God.

Chapter Forty-Five

Lightness of being awaits us.

Good advice: "Embrace the light." Better advice: "Embrace the lightness."

If we embrace the light, but still grimly hold on to a bevy of heavy burdens, then we have missed the prevailing point of the "light" and remain under the heavy yoke of the law.

Lightheartedness, laughter, and lilting love are our inheritance. Jesus said His burden was light. Dear Lord, let's all believe and relish that assurance?

Let's all release the heaviness. Lightness of being awaits us.

Chapter Forty-Six

Thy Thummim and thy Urim.

Here is a jewel of an image from the Old Testament.

"And of Levi he said, Thy Thummim and thy Urim are the godly one." (Deuteronomy 33:8).

The Urim ("lights") and Thummim ("perfections") were gemstones that the high priest of Israel wore on his ephod/garment. They were used in some mystical way by the high priest to determine God's will.

Jesus explained to the Emmaus disciples how ALL the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Him. (Luke 24:26-32, 45). So, these two mystical gemstones speak of Jesus in some vital way.

The Thummim and Urim represent the divine "gemstone" nature of Jesus. He is the very "perfection" and "light" of His Father.

Jesus is OUR righteous spiritual garment, our ephod, which we are to PUT ON daily to discern the will of God for our lives. As we don His divine nature of "light" and "perfection," we are able to confidently apprehend the perfect will of God to enlighten all our paths.

> "Put on the armor of light.... Put on the Lord Jesus!"
>
> Romans 13:12, 14

> "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above , and cometh down from the FATHER OF LIGHTS, with whom is no variableness , neither shadow of turning."
>
> James 1:17

Put on the Thummim and Urim, the perfection and light of God--- Jesus Christ!

This is one beautiful gemstone dynamic.

Chapter Forty-Seven

It's time to come home.

I know a man who felt guilty.

He had tried to feel clean for several years after stumbling into a horrible sin. Every day, under his breath, he would endlessly lament and chant to God, "I am sorry" or "Please forgive me" at least a dozen times a day.

And yet he felt no relief. And his soul withered, all the while cutting and disfiguring himself with the blade of self-condemnation.

And then one day, the man heard in his heart that the Lord was weeping. The man thought God was weeping over his great sin many years ago, and the man started to weep as well.

But then the Lord quickened a most surprising insight to this man's heart:

"Child, I'm not weeping over your sin. I'm weeping that you won't receive my forgiveness. I forgave you an eternity ago. I have wanted you to taste my healing ever since this thing happened. But you haven't really sought my forgiveness. And you are not forgiving others who hurt you in the wake of your sin.

I tell you this not to hurt you but to help you heal. You are seeking the devil's forgiveness, not mine. And he will never grant it, while I will never withhold it. Come, lean your head on my chest and let me show you how well you are received-- the best ring, the best robe, and the best wine all await you. It's time to come home."

Chapter Forty-Eight

Reading the inner impulses of the Holy Spirit.

"Reading the inner impulses" of the Holy Spirit is the most important type of literacy there is.

Formal Biblical literacy in "the dead letter" of Scripture doesn't cure Holy Spirit "illiteracy." Hard and prideful hearts can't "read" the promptings and illuminative input of the Spirit, no matter HOW educated they believe themselves to be.

The Holy Spirit doesn't test us on Bible knowledge, but the Bible certainly tests us on Holy Spirit knowledge. "The children of God are those LED by the Spirit of

God" in ALL things, including the profitable reading of Scripture. Romans 8:14.

I believe the simplest man reading the Bible with a devotionally tender and earnest heart can withdraw more useful manna from it than can any self-sufficient scholar whose heart is hard to the "illuminative quickenings" of the Holy Spirit.

The Emmaus disciples' hearts "burned within them" as Jesus explained to them all the non-apparent ways He was embedded in all the OT Scriptures (Luke 24). The literalist Bible scholars of Jesus' day would no doubt have given Him a hermeneutical 'F' for taking all their OT Scriptures out of context.

But, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, transformed the literal readings of Scripture into a treasure trove of embedded parables, epiphanies, metaphors, and allegories, ALL of which pointed to Himself.

This Christological ambrosia flows in the subtext underneath all the OT Scripture, like a raging underground river.

The rapids of this river are rafted by the righteous who passionately pursue, intuitively grasp, and imaginatively understand that the true import of all Scripture is only and always to reveal Christ.

Chapter Forty-Nine

Here is one way to know if you're reading Scripture profitably.

Amazing fact: the Greek word for "conscience" literally means "co-perception."

The human conscience is that part of us which EITHER "co-perceives" reality with the Spirit of Christ's love or "co-distorts" reality with the spirit of wrath (fear, pride, anger, covetousness, condemnation, cruelty, hate).

A defiled conscience speaks of dismal co-perceptions. A clean conscience speaks of sparkling co-perceptions with the Spirit of love and light.

Here is one way to know if you're reading Scripture profitably. Reading it should help you FIND and CONSULT your conscience, not cause you to LOSE and IGNORE it.

The conscience is our inner chamber of communion where God's nature percolates with promptings, intuitions, and inklings. Scriptures, above all else, should help sensitize us to these promptings, not harden us to ignore them.

I have been told on more than one occasion that I am teaching error because I say we should follow our Spirit-quickened consciences when reading Scriptures (not to mention following them as well when we do most anything else).

One person commented to me, "You lost me at saying we should follow our Spirit-quickened consciences." The person went on the say that only the Bible is authoritative and our consciences have nothing to do with determining the truth of it.

Can what this person said possibly be true? Well, it makes some sense to first see what the Scriptures actually say about the human conscience. It's amazing that the literalist who corrected me by claiming that "only the word of Scripture is to be used to determine truth" doesn't even know that the Bible repeatedly encourages us to use our human consciences to bear witness with the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit...." Romans 9:1

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience...." 2 Corinthians 1:12

Scriptures reveal that the conscience can be good in the sense of blameless, clear, clean, and pure (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21). The conscience can be cleansed, cleared, perfected, purified, washed, purged, and sprinkled clean (Heb. 9:9, 14; 10:22).

But, having a cleansed and purged conscience then allows us to do what? In other words, WHAT exactly IS the purpose of a clear conscience?

Here is an astounding truth. In the Old Testament imagery of the Temple, we find prophetic shadows of our "inner beings" under the New Covenant. The New Testament certainly exhorts us to penetrate and apply this symbolism to our lives today, here, and now. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" - 1 Corinthians 3:16.

Our conscience is our "inner high priest," which has been sprinkled and anointed by Christ to enter into His Holy of Holies, which resides deep within each of us.

Our priestly conscience freely enters into interactive communion with the Ark of the Testimony, which lies

within the Holy of Holies. The Ark of the Testimony here is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit. God's Spirit alone is the transmission source of all "Testimony" from the Godhead.

Co-perceiving. Co-operation. Communion.

Chapter Fifty

Love whispered is so much stronger than love shouted.

I know this is counterintuitive, but I believe "love whispered" is so much stronger than "love shouted."

Elijah discovered this in the cave of his fears. He heard God's love in the whispering breeze rather than the violent wind, rumbling earthquake, and raging fire.

Moses discovered this when he loudly struck the rock of love rather than gently speaking to it.

Who knew whispers could be so nuclear!

Less is more.

Less bravado. More communicado.

Less show. More flow.

Less presuming. More crooning.

Love is tender-toned and honey-honed. It's the Sabbath rest of peaceful abiding which Hebrews so sweetly envisions.

Part 5

Reading Scripture

Chapter Fifty-One

WHY DIDN'T JESUS WRITE THE BIBLE HIMSELF?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus didn't write the New Testament in His own perfect handwriting?

If He had, then nobody could argue that Scripture wasn't always literally accurate and historically perfect. And yet, Jesus didn't do this for a very obvious reason.

Had Jesus written the Gospels Himself, then we could read them WITHOUT the Holy Spirit's further guidance, and never question their meaning as being anything other than literal.

We would, in effect, idolize literalism since it came directly from the pen of Jesus. This "idolatry of the literal"

is exactly what happened to the Ten Commandments written by the “finger of God.”

“It's like a finger pointing away to the moon. Dont concentrate on the finger or you will miss all that heavenly glory.” — Bruce Lee.

Beloved, do you see? Today, millions of Jews and Christians worship the "finger" of the Bible pointing to the heavens rather than wholeheartedly focusing on the heavens themselves. They worship the finger of the law instead of that at which the law is ALWAYS pointing --- Jesus and the Spirit of God. They worship the literal rather than the Spiritual.

This is why God, in all His wisdom, used imperfect men to mediate and write Scripture, so that we would have to ALWAYS depend on the Spirit’s guidance to properly read, understand, and apply God’s inspiration.

The finger of Scripture IS divinely inspired, but STILL a human finger, a little bent and twisted perhaps, but still always pointing at Jesus. Because we recognize the finger as human, we will not become fixated on it by giving it some kind of divine status the Lord never intended it to have. Instead, we will follow the finger and thrust our souls upward to achieve orbital interactions with Christ in the heavenly places.

Great Bible scholars have noted the occasional human imprecisions and inaccuracies in the Scripture, such

as when Matthew 27:9 misquotes Zechariah 11:13 as having been said by Jeremiah, and also when Acts 7:16 erroneously lists Abraham, rather than Jacob, as the purchaser of the sepulcher from the sons of Emmor\Hamor per Joshua 24:32.

God is perfect. Men are not. The Bible's inspiration is perfect. Men's expressions of that inspiration are not always perfect.

As C. S. Lewis said, "The human qualities of the raw material show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, and even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not 'the Word of God' in the sense that every passage in itself gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God." Or perhaps, better put, it is a finger pointing to the Word of God--- Jesus Christ!

The inspiration is the key. Just as the shell of a nut "husks" the seed within, so does the literal shell of Scripture "husk" the inspiration of God encased within. Scriptures are divinely inspired truths husked to varying degrees by human perceptions, misperceptions, and partial perceptions.

Let's consider some examples. Peter's revelation that Jesus was the Christ was a PERFECT and COMPLETE human perception of a divinely inspired truth. Flesh and blood didn't reveal this to Peter, but the Heavenly Father. Matthew 16:17.

However, Moses' striking of the rock in anger was a PARTIAL perception of God (Numbers 20). Moses was part right and part wrong in his perception, because while God inspired Moses to perform a miracle of provision for the parched Israelites, God did not want it delivered in Moses's wrathful tone of striking the rock. Rather, God wanted the miracle done by Moses merely speaking to the rock. Moses failed to sanctify the name of the Lord here, and it kept him out of the Promised Land.

Finally, many Old Testament saints totally misperceived the inspiration of God altogether, such as when Job attributed evil to God or when David prayed for Babylonian children's heads to be bashed against the rocks (Ps. 137:8-9).

The bottom line is that Scriptural inspiration does not mean that the men who wrote the Bible had perfect perceptions of God. In fact, Scripture tells us that prior to Jesus, no man had "seen God at any time" (Jn. 1:18; 6:46). Thus, without the Holy Spirit's guidance through Scriptures, we are blind to God's true nature.

Even with God's guidance and inspiration, we still can inadvertently husk His revelation with our own partial perceptions. The thinner the husk of the writer, the closer the literal and Spiritual meanings converge. The thicker the husk of the writer, the more literal and Spiritual meanings will differ.

Paul said we are "able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the spirit: for the letter kills but the spirit gives life." 2 Cor. 3:6. Scriptures then warn us on their face not to merely read them "literally" and in "our own understanding."

Our mistake is in thinking these admonitions don't apply to us. In other words, we can wrongly presume that when we read Scriptures, we automatically are already in the Spirit, or that our past understanding of them is automatically right and Spiritual.

Rather, the premise I am suggesting is that our indwelling Christ is the only "quickening agent" when it comes to scriptural interpretation.

Literalists wrongly treat Scripture as the landing pad of truth. In other words, all truth must land on its "literal" runways to be authentic.

However, the proper way to view Scriptures is not as a landing pad, but as a launching pad. Scriptures, when they are spiritually quickened to us by the Holy Spirit, propel us into Heavenly interaction with the Trinity. This quickening comes from the "rhema" word of God, from the very now mouth of God to the very now heart of man.

Chapter Fifty-Two

SCRIPTURE MUST BEND ITS INTERPRETIVE KNEE TO JESUS

Every Scripture must bend its interpretive knee to the name (nature) of Jesus.

The Scriptures don't define Jesus.

Jesus defines Scriptures.

To read the Old Testament without applying the theological upgrades of the New Testament (as revealed by and through the divine nature of Jesus) is the mother of all bad ideas. It can lead to reading Scripture with a non-Christological, sub-Christological, and even an anti-Christological hermeneutic.

Jesus is the sole "Rosetta Stone" that translates the Scriptures' better and brighter meanings.

Jesus is the sole remover of the carnal "veil" which blocks humanity from understanding Scripture with the love and light of God.

Jesus, through His Spirit who now indwells us, is the sole catalyzing agent that activates the spiritual illumination of Scriptures.

Jesus' nature alone carries the "tonal resonance" necessary to hear His Abba's heart concerning Scripture's fuller meaning.

The nature of Jesus is our tried and true "tuning fork"—both spiritually and scripturally.

Chapter Fifty-Three

Three Would-Be Killers

RIDDLE ME THIS: WHAT DID THE FOLLOWING THREE GROUPS OF "WOULD BE" KILLERS HAVE IN COMMON?

1) James and John wanted Jesus to call down killing fire on the Samaritans for rejecting them in Luke 9:54 (just like Elijah did to the rebellious Samaritans in 2 Kings 1:10, 12);

2) The Pharisees wanted to execute Jesus' disciples to death for Sabbath-breaking in Matthew 12:1-7 (just like Moses commanded all Sabbath breakers stoned to death, no exceptions, in Exodus 31:14-15 and 35:2, and who in fact stoned a man to death in similar circumstances for just picking up sticks on the Sabbath in Numbers 15:32-36);

3) The mob seeking to stone the woman to death who had been caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 (just like Moses commanded all adulterers to death in Leviticus 20:10, no exceptions);

WHAT did these would-be killers all have on their side?

ANSWER: The Bible.

All these bloodthirsty people were relying on well-known Scriptures, established Scriptures, clear Scriptures, compelling Scriptures. I cite all the passages above.

Each of these mobs thought they had the spiritual high ground. But you know what? They didn't.

Jesus told James and John they "knew not what spirit they were of, because He came to save life, not to destroy it." Luke 9:55. He told the Pharisees seeking to execute His disciples for Sabbath-breaking that He Himself was "Lord of the Sabbath" and that His disciples were "blameless" and "guiltless" because He "wanted mercy and not sacrifice." Matthew 12:5-8. After scattering the mob seeking to stone her, Jesus told the adulterous woman that He Himself did NOT condemn her. John 8:11. He cleansed all their plows of wrath with His Spirit of rescuing love.

The point here is that we all need more than JUST the Bible on our side. These people all may have had the

literal Bible on their side, but they did not have Jesus on their side. They did not have the Holy Spirit on their side. And they did not have the Heavenly Father on their side.

Time and time again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said the Scripture may literally SAY this, but I spiritually SAY..... This is all I am advocating here: to let Jesus' nature, Jesus' presence, and Jesus' wisdom have the FIRST and BEST say when it comes to us reading Scripture.

Each of these three mobs had read the Scriptures literally, each thought they clearly understood them, and each was confident they were serving God. What a chilling prospect! Don't ever let the "literal" words get in the way of "spiritual" Jesus.

Chapter Fifty-Four

When even Scripture is not Scriptural.

Sometimes even Scripture is not Scriptural.

"Eye for an eye" IS Scriptural: "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Deuteronomy 19:21

"But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

Exodus 21:23-25

"fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured."

Leviticus 24:20

But then again, "eye for an eye" is NOT scriptural:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Matthew 5:39

Chapter Fifty-Five

Make the texts delectible.

I think that dead letter literalists often don't "chew" their spiritual food.

"Mine is to chew on the appropriate texts and make them delectable."

— Gregory of Nyssa

In other words, we are not to swallow the text "bones and all." That presents a choking hazard, which causes us to weaponize the text to justify hate, condemnation, and wrath.

Instead, we are to beautify the text by allowing the Spirit to bring it into savory alignment with the nature of Jesus.

"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him." Psalm 34:8.

I think a common problem is that we can too quickly swallow the Bible without first chewing on it. It then causes us severe spiritual indigestion at best and vomitus religious regurgitation at worst.

In natural, chewing and salivation soften and prepare the meat, making it safe and palatable for us to consume.

Likewise, in the spiritual, our meditative chewing combined with the prompting salivations of our Spirit-quickened consciences brings needed flavor and moisture to tenderize and aid in our nutritious digestion of Scripture.

So, when consuming Scripture, let's always REMEMBER to:

1)remove any choking hazards and any bones of lethal literalism which contradict the nature of the Abba-Father as revealed and modeled by Jesus,

2)cogitate and "chew" on passages with our Spirit-quickened consciences, using intensive care and energetic goodwill to allegorically absorb Scriptures' heartier and sweeter flavors,

3)draw salivating and revealing juices from the Spirit's illuminating, enhancing, and tenderizing input.

If we do the above, we will scrumptiously taste and succulently see that the Lord is only and always good.

Scripture is merely a messianic menu which bears metaphysical witness to that goodness.

Chapter Fifty-Six

It takes God to explain God.

Language is so squishy. Words slip. They slide. They squirm. Words mean different things to different people.

Meanings evolve, morph, and sometimes mutate. Words sometimes cooperate with our inner intentions, but other times they clash, collide, and corrupt our best efforts to speak the truth.

Language is a very iffy proposition.

"'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'"

Lewis Carroll

It is for this reason that we MUST allow the promptings of Abba's Spirit working through our conscience to be our universal translator.

It takes God to explain God.

If 90% of human communication is non-verbal (as experts tell us), then how much more of the divine-human dialogue is non-verbal?

Language is wondrous and poetic when we hold it deftly and loosely, but it becomes hard and brittle when we clench it literally and legalistically.

Stay loose and give language room to breathe. Otherwise, it will suffocate all those who hear it from hearing life.

Chapter Fifty-Seven

In the Old Testament, God is miscast as crushing and cursing His enemies.

UPGRADES, come get your UPGRADES!!! In the Old Testament, God is miscast as crushing and cursing His enemies.

In the New Testament, God is rightly cast as commanding love and blessing to His enemies. Matthew 5:38-48.

To read the Old Testament without applying the theological upgrades of the New Testament (as revealed

by and through the divine nature of Jesus) is the mother of all bad ideas.

Literalism can lead to reading Scripture with a non-Christological, sub-Christological, and even an anti-Christological hermeneutic.

Chapter Fifty-Eight

A Spirit-quickened conscience.

The most important tool in our Bible reading tool-kit is not a concordance, but a conscience.

A Spirit-quickened conscience.

A conscience tenderized to the tender tones and indefatigable love nature of Jesus.

A conscience committed to penetrate, imagine, and explicate Scripture's best and brightest Christological meanings.

"I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 9:1).

Our inner wrath can sooooo easily weaponize most any Scripture at the drop of a hermeneutical hat… but only IF and AS we deaden the promptings of our conscience.

Jesus is the very conscience of God.

When we read the Old Testament, we must remember that Jesus is the very conscience of God.

This living conscience approves, disapproves, or improves all our thoughts and perceptions with regard to any passage.

Jesus is the master translator of the Lord's nature and wisdom. And He is a live-in translator, always abiding and available in our thought life.

As Paul said, we have the mind of Christ. And nowhere is this more needed than when we read Scripture, especially the Old Testament.

Good reading both sensitizes and stimulates the conscience of the reader to penetrate the deeper issues of the text with epiphany, imagination, and intuition.

Bad reading, by contrast, desensitizes and de-stimulates the conscience of the reader to stay shallow and mindlessly subservient to the surface of the text, i.e., flat

and "dead-letter" text reading cauterizes the conscience and neuters the imagination.

Sometimes a pristine conscience "rejoices" in what is written. Other times, a pristine conscience "rebels" against what is written. Still other times, a pristine conscience "evolves" or "beautifies" what is written.

When it comes to Scriptures, here is the first and best truth to remember: Jesus IS the pristine conscience of God.

God wants us to find our Spirit-quickened consciences when we read Scripture, not lose them.

Some people LOSE their sensitivity of conscience when reading the Bible. They deaden themselves to mercy, goodness, and love by embracing the "dead letter" reading of OT wrath, OT cruelty, and OT hostility. Paul warns us not to let this happen in 2 Corinthians 3.

Others FIND their consciences when reading the Bible. They instead deaden themselves to OT wrath, OT cruelty, and OT hostility by embracing Jesus' indwelling

Spirit and personality as God's complete goodwill toward mankind.

Chapter Fifty-Nine

Let's disarm scripture.

Paul said the dead-letter reading of Scripture kills, while the Spirit-quickened reading of Scripture brings life.

Here is why.

Dead letter literalism seeks to "weaponize" Scripture to condemn, accuse, and crush humans made in the image of God. (i.e., beat plowshares into swords).

Living Spirit readings seek to "disarm" Scripture of all human hostility so that all may taste limitless life. (i.e., beat swords into plowshares).

The Angels heralded the birth of the Prince of Life as follows, "Peace on earth, goodwill toward man." All

Scriptural meaning must flow from that interpretive motive.

Chapter Sixty

The context-cops.

Before you let yourself get busted by the "context cops" and the "authorial intent" brigade, consider this fact.

Paul seldom read the Old Testament in a way that was ball-and-chained to the historical context or the human author's original intent. Paul, in the passages he cited, almost always re-routed and reconfigured their subtext to Jesus. Jesus likewise transfigured all the Old Testament passages to Himself.

They both would have flunked many modern seminaries--- and happily so.

Chapter Sixty-One

What is spiritual reading?

Scriptures are indeed wonderful, unique and divinely inspired. There is no religious document in the history of humanity which matches their value. They are to be revered and considered for their historical truth, their beauty as literature, and most importantly for their Spiritual meaning.

But, Scriptures are not the entire and ultimate Word of God. According to the first Chapter of the Book of John, Jesus is the Word of God, literally the "Logos." The Logos is best defined as "the manifested nature or expressed essence of God."

Jesus is the Logos of God who indwells our hearts.

Written Scriptures are blessed mirrors which help us recognize, receive, and realize the divine nature of Christ seeking to to indwell us. Only the Logos operating in us can properly understand, interpret and apply the Scriptures in an undistorted way that is Spiritual and true.

Of course, Scriptures can carry literal truth which blesses somewhat, as it sometimes did with Moses. However, Scriptures' primary purpose is to carry Spiritual truth, as it did with Jesus.

When the literal agrees with the Spiritual, believe both wholeheartedly.

When the literal differs from but doesn't contradict the Spiritual, use the literal carefully, but prioritize the Spiritual.

But, when the literal contradicts the Spiritual and attributes evil to God, then the literal must be divorced and detached from the Spiritual.

This has happened more in Church history than you might think. As C. S. Lewis noted in his Reflections on the Psalms, St. Jerome considered part of the Book of Genesis to possibly be poetic rather than literal.

"Ignorant assertions about God appear to be nothing else but this: that Scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter." Origen, On First Principles 4:2.1-2, 4.

John Calvin had no problem believing the Book of Job to be fiction rather than literal history. Martin Luther didn't consider it proper to read portions of the Books of Hebrews, James and Revelation literally and that no doctrines should be founded on these Epistles.

John Wesley and C. S. Lewis both believed in a non-literal reading of passages which on their face seem to attribute evil to God. Even Billy Graham didn't believe that Hell was a place of literal fiery torment as "literally" described in the Scriptures.

The point is that all who are led of God use their Spirit-quickened conscience to help properly interpret Scripture, and so should we whenever the "letter" of Scripture violates the "Spirit" of Scripture.

Scriptures are the fingers of inspired men pointing us to continual and fuller interactions with God. The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century, and even Martin Luther himself early in his walk, believed that this way of reading Scriptures was the only blessed way to read the Bible.

This approach is called "Pneumatic (Spiritual) Exegesis" and essentially means "Spiritual Reading." Consider Luther on this point in stating that the Bible "cannot be mastered by study or talent . . .you must rely solely on the influx of the Spirit." Only later in his life did Luther change to "literal" exegesis in order to more effectively

refute and condemn his enemies. This mistake changed the course of his life and greatly harmed his anointing.

I certainly grant you that Spiritual Exegesis can be misnamed if the person doing it isn't Spiritual, or if the person doing it isn't seeking to be illumined by the wisdom of love.

This explains why many who claim to use Spiritual Exegesis are really engaging in flights of fancy and imagination rather than truly hearing God Himself illuminate the Scriptures in a coherent way.

But, just because some may abuse and misuse this principle doesn't mean it's wrong. Actually, the greatest truths are often surrounded by the greatest abuses. Dead letter literalism has historically caused far more violent abuses than has Spiritual Reading.

I propose that all Bible readers need to learn and employ Spiritual Exegesis in excavating, elevating and renovating the Bible from the letter into the Spirit. The result will be a fulfillment of God's goodness in the reading of any and all Scripture. The Bible will come alive and pulsate with the goodness of God.

No longer will Scriptures be the "Paper Pope" whom we serve in the oldness of the letter. Scriptures instead will be inspired impressions left by the actual and living Word of God - - the Lord Jesus. These impressions will

help us remember and recognize our own indwelling inspiration.

Scriptures will be the diving board from which we dive into the fullness of God. To keep the diving board flexible, we must remove all husks of brittle and dry "opinions" which we have wrongly projected onto both God and Scripture and which have prevented us from "springing" into the bottomless depths of God's goodness.

Keep the following dynamics in mind when reading God's goodness into all the Scriptures:

1) Scriptures are inspired by God, but then again so are you. You are a living epistle of God which also is written by inspiration of God.

2) We must be inspired by God ourselves in order to properly understand and blend with the inspiration of Scripture (2 Cor. 3:2-4). We are to be able ministers of the New Testament who read Scriptures not by the "letter" (just literally and with our own natural understanding), but we read all Scripture by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:5-6). The "letter" kills but the Spirit gives life. With the Spirit, we are enabled and empowered to transform, enhance and enrich Scripture just as Jesus did when He excavated, renovated and elevated Old Testament law into New Testament light during the Sermon on the Mount.

3) Reading Scriptures by the Spirit means allowing our indwelling Christ to explain to our hearts not what the

verses just literally say, but what the verses Spiritually mean. Sometimes the literal and Spiritual meanings are exactly the same. Sometimes the meanings may vary but still complement one another. But, still other times, the Spiritual and literal completely contradict one another. In this latter case, the Spiritual meaning must be preferred to the literal. Only the Spirit can rightly divide the word.

4) No Scripture is of any private interpretation. In other words, only Jesus can explain the Scriptures to us. He is the character, nature and Logos of God. We have no "privacy" rights to read Scripture without the Holy Spirit's guidance. The Holy Spirit won't test on Scripture knowledge, but reading Scripture will test us on Holy Spirit knowledge.

5) We must not allow Scripture to define God's character. Rather, we must allow God's character to define Scripture. Scriptures are divinely inspired truths "husked" to varying degrees by human perceptions, partial perceptions and occasional mis-perceptions. Rightly dividing the Word is removing any human husk surrounding the true Spiritual meat of Scripture. This "fulfills" Scripture with the goodness of God. Jesus did it. Paul did it. And we must do it if we want to exchange meat for milk. Literal milk is good and is fine for Spiritual babes, but meat is for the mature who have had their senses trained to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:12-14).

6) Don't worship Scriptures: worship with the Scriptures. They are the launching pad of truth, not the landing pad. They help launch us into Heavenly interaction where we experience Jesus as the truth. As C. S. Lewis rightly said: "It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true word of God. The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him." Letters of C. S. Lewis, (8 Nov. 1952), pg. 247.

Chapter Sixty-Two

Old Testament Presumptions.

Historical and grammatical contexts are not the ONLY contexts to look at when reading the Old Testament. There is also "theological context."

In other words, the Old Testament writers had certain theological presumptions that differ from the Christologically informed New Testament presumptions that now illuminate our lives.

These lesser-informed Old Testament presumptions include the following:

1. Satan is an obedient servant angel of God, RATHER than the cosmic, homicidal, and lying rebel the New Testament portrays him to be.

2. God commands and controls the wills of all men to do what He predestines, RATHER than the better-informed New Testament view that Satan lures men to misuse the limits of their freedom.

3. God is solely responsible for bringing BOTH good and evil, bringing BOTH temptation and bringing protection, bringing BOTH light and darkness, and bringing BOTH destruction and healing; RATHER than the New Testament view that God is light and in Him is NO darkness, NO evil, NO destruction, and NO temptation.

It's not so much that the Old Testament saints were wrong on these issues as much as they were developmentally limited due to the dispensation in which they lived.

I am certainly NOT saying the Old Testament is unreliable on every level, just that occasionally, and strictly on the LITERAL level, it presents a distorted view of God which Jesus course, corrects in the New. See Matthew 5:38-48.

On the allegorical level, I believe the Old Testament can ALWAYS be plumbed for treasure, which points to Christ and His kingdom. But this requires spiritual eyes to read it, not by the dead letter, but by the living Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Jesus showed in Luke 24:27 that ALL the OT Scriptures speak of Him. But, since very few of them literally speak of Jesus, He was obviously displaying a spiritual/allegorical hermeneutic to them.

So, Jesus' emphasis on the Old Testament on the road to Emmaus is the reason I don't advocate Marcionism, which would have us just cast away the Old Testament revelation altogether.

And in fairness, for every nightmare passage of Old Testament divine violence, there are probably tenfold which point to God's absolute goodness and eternal loving kindness.

Really, to make the Old Testament hum, we just need to allow for its developmental distortions by letting the Spirit of Christ course correct it as needed to better align with His divine nature.

Chapter Sixty-Three

Have you been "strobed?"

Have you ever been confused or confounded by an Old Testament verse that appears to say God sends evil your way, when in other places in the Bible it says God would never send evil your way?

Ever been confused or confounded by a "strobe-light" which appears to light your way, but then allows darkness to alternate with light flashes so that your way is unclear and unsure?

The STROBE-EFFECT describes the disorienting effect from "snapshot" vision through the use of flickering lights or vibrating shutters. We have all experienced the choppy and confusing effects of moving through strobe-lighted areas, whether it be at a fair, dance, party, concert or class demonstration.

Basically, we stop seeing reality in a smooth and continuous flow. Instead, we see reality solely in snapshots through alternating flashes of light and dark. We see briefly, then are blinded briefly ---- light, dark, light, dark, light, dark. We are left unbalanced, unsure and confused. We see some things briefly, but we lose the visual feelings of momentum, flow and movement. These isolated "snippets of seeing" leave us with sensations of disconnectedness. Isolation breeds isolation. Isolated perception results in isolated thinking, isolated feelings and isolated being.

In the Spirit realm, there is a similar dynamic which confuses us into low levels of faith, hope and confidence toward God. We become tentative in our view of God because for every INSIGHT OF LIGHT we receive toward God, it is quickly blotted over by an INSIGHT OF DARKNESS. We are left isolated and shrugging our shoulders about God's nature because we simply don't see God in a continuous and coherent stream of light and love.

The good news is God revealed through Jesus Christ does NOT use strobe-lighting in the New Testament.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." 1 John 1:5. NO STROBING IN OTHER WORDS.

But the Old Testament is another story.

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things." Isaiah 45:7. MUCH STROBING IN OTHER WORDS.

BOTH CAN'T BE RIGHT!

Either God uses "strobe-lighting" or He doesn't.

Beloved, what is going on here? Are these verses, read together, warning us that sometimes the Old Testament has light and darkness, strobing in other words, while the New Testament does not?

YES! All the brilliant light flashes in the Old Testament are strictly from God, whereas any apparent darkness comes from what theologians call the "sleight capacity" of Old Testament saints to process and convey the spiritual impulses they were receiving from the Lord.

The Old Testament dark flashes stem not from God, but rather are "light-blocking eclipses of ignorance" from men's dim and partial understanding of God's nature. The Old Testament saints had not yet fully differentiated in their minds the works of God from the works of Satan.

Ancient Jewish Literature

This dynamic is well documented in ancient Jewish literature. Modern Judaism still to this day believes Satan

is God's obedient servant angel. This is one of the major Old Testament misconceptions the New Testament corrected. "For if that first 'covenant' had been faultless (literally "without FLAW"), then would no place have been sought for a second." Hebrews 8:7.

Both Old Testament Judaism and traditional Calvinism attribute ALL things good and EVIL to the direct hand of God. God is the author and doer of BOTH good and evil.

New Testament theology, by contrast, attributes ONLY good, light, love, and life to God. God is the author and doer of ONLY good. The misused freewill of Fallen Powers and fractured men co-author and co-execute any and all evil.

If you haven't ever noticed the stark differences in the Old and New Testament views on the source of all evil, then check out the passages below.

OLD TESTAMENT DARK FLASHES

Job 2:10

"You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good FROM God, and not EVIL?"

Isaiah 45:7

"I form the light and create darkness, I make peace, and create EVIL; I, the LORD, DO all these things."

Jeremiah 32:42

"This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them."

Lamentations 3:37-38

"Who is there who speaks and it comes to pass, Unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High That BOTH good and EVIL go forth?"

Amos 3:6

"Shall there be EVIL in the city, and The Lord hath not DONE it."

Pretty cut and dry, isn't it? God is BOTH good and evil, BOTH light and dark, BOTH wrath and forgiveness, etc.

But wait. Let's hear what the upgraded New Testament says about all this.

NEW TESTAMENT LIGHT FLASHES

1John 1:5.

"God is light and in Him is NO darkness at ALL."

James 1:13-18

(Evil cannot be traced back to God in ANY form or fashion.) “Let no man say when he is 'tempted' ('pieradzo' means 'tested, enticed, disciplined, proved, tempted or tried' Strong's Lexicon #3985), I am tempted of God : for God CANNOT be tempted with evil , neither TEMPTS HE ANY MAN : But every man is tempted , when he is drawn away of his OWN lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. Do not err , my beloved brethren . Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above , and comes down from the Father of lights , with whom is no variableness , neither shadow of turning . Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth , that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."

John 10:10

"The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Acts 10:38

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about DOING GOOD , and HEALING ALL that were oppressed OF the DEVIL ; for God was with him."

Luke 10:19

"Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over ALL the power of the ENEMY: and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

I relish the reality that we NOW live under a better covenant with better promises and better ideas of God.

The good news is that the "strobe-light" effect is over for New Testament believers. Our eyes have now been opened to the always abiding light, movement and momentum of God's goodness. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17.

No more shuddering or flickering understanding of His goodness. No more shoulder shrugging. No more fear. No more helplessness. No more BLAMING God for evil, suffering or disasters. Satan is ALWAYS the killer and accuser, not Jesus.

Be of good cheer! Jesus has OVERCOME the world! OUR faith in THAT fact is what allows US to overcome our world. Jesus trumps all Old Testament strobing. The Old Testament is not the last word on the problem of suffering. Jesus is! The last word and the first, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end! He is our HERO. Take heart! Just like He did for Peter, though Satan desires to sift us, Jesus has prayed for us that our faith won't fail. And it won't!

Chapter Sixty-Four

The burning bush.

Curious about the name of God revealed to Moses by the burning bush?

If so, let's take our spiritual shoes off and revisit that burning bush.

Our quest to newly understand the name of God begins on this holiest of grounds. Here, Moses was given the eternal name of God - - Yahweh. This name holds and reveals a great mystery about God.

Exodus 3 tells the story. Moses, while tending his sheep at Mount Horeb, beheld a burning bush which was not being consumed by the flames. Out of this bush, the voice of God commanded Moses to take off his shoes, "for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Ex. 3:5).

This tells us the name of God is holy ground and that we must humbly shed our soles AND souls of all man-made barriers to truly prepare ourselves to receive His name.

The Lord then reveals His name to Moses as "I AM THAT I AM," literallyYahweh, and that this will be, "My name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Ex. 3:14-15). All generations are to remember, recognize, and realize that Yahweh is the name of God. For the Hebrews, the name was not an arbitrary title but represented the essential essence, character, and authority of a person.

So, what does the name Yahweh represent? Translations range from "I AM THAT I AM" to "I AM AND CONTINUE TO BE PRESENT." But we must remember to add the concept of forever to this name, as the Lord commanded in verse 15. Thus, Yahweh means "forever already present," or as I like to say, "Always Already." God is "always already" aware, "always already" prepared, "always already" empowered, "always already" merciful, "always already" willing, and "always already" available to save, heal, and deliver us.

German theologians note that the Hebrew word "Yah or Jah" (I am) is linguistically related to the German word Ja, which means yes. From this angle, God essentially says to Moses, "I AM YES, I AM THE ETERNAL YES, I AM THE EVERPRESENT ALWAYS ALREADY YES AND AMEN!"

Isn't this glorious? Does the Bible support the Eternal "Yes-ness" of God's nature? Oh, yes! "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was NOT yes and no, but in him was YES. For ALL the promises of God in him are YES, and in him AMEN, unto the glory of God by us." 2 Cor. 1:19-20. Yes, Yes, Yes! Always only IN Christ, but IN Him "ALWAYS ALREADY YES!"

Martin Buber, author of the classic book "I and Thou," adds another beautiful insight into interpreting the name "Yahweh." Buber traces the word back to Yah, Yahu, or Yahuvah, and paraphrases it as "He, this one, this is it, oh he!"

Thus, the name Yahweh is an exclamation of joyful recognition uttered in a moment of religious ecstasy. "God cannot be properly named, only exclaimed." Buber abbreviates the definition of "Yahweh" to be "the one." Yahweh, then, is an EXPERIENTIAL response to God revealing His presence to man. If Buber would allow me the latitude, I think a more contemporary expression of Yahweh would be, "Oh, You are the one I've been waiting for - - the one I never knew I always wanted. You are the Yes to my hearts question - - my eternal Yes!"

When Peter pleased Jesus with his confession that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus said this would be "the rock" upon which the Church

would be built (Matt. 16:15-19). The rock here was NOT the confession itself, but rather Peter's experiential exclamation of God's presence IN Jesus as revealed BY the Father. Without the experience of God's presence, Peter's confession would be meaningless. Our proper use of Jesus' name will always be based on a "who" interaction WITH Him, not a "what" interaction with some idea or opinion ABOUT Him.

So what's the conclusion of the matter? When we approach the Lord's name (His nature and presence) with our shoes removed (all man-made opinions, pride, and self-reliance), THEN we will behold the ETERNAL ALWAYS ALREADY "YES" OF GOD!

Chapter Sixty-Five

New Testament speakers and writers practiced Pneumatic Exegesis.

Here is a stunning fact.

When New Testament writers (or speakers) cited Old Testament passages, they never parsed the original Hebrew or the Septuagint Greek for the audience.

Nor did they exegete the passage for grammatical or historical context. They had no discernible interpretive precepts to which they had to strictly adhere when interpreting the Bible.

They often avoided context and human authorial intent altogether.

What DID they do with Old Testament passages they cited? They allegorized them, they updated them, and they improvised them to align with God's Christological love and light. In short, they violated almost every interpretive rule taught today by seminaries. This I know because I attended one such seminary.

The New Testament speakers and writers instead practiced what the Anabaptists called Pneumatic Exegesis (aka Spiritual Reading).

Every Scripture got re-routed to the relevance and revelation of Christ, even if in doing so the original Old Testament passage had to be semantically "shaved" or "pared" of some of its literality.

Jesus and Paul were the two great giants of allegorical reading. Jesus frequently allegorized the Old Testament. Using key imagery from Old Testament passages that many ONLY see as literal-historical events, Jesus would "shave" and "pare" their literal meaning into an allegorical application toward Himself. He referred to Himself as the Temple of God (John 2:19-22), the true manna from heaven (John 6:50), Jacob's supernatural ladder (John 1:51), the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-40), the IAM burning bush of Exodus 3 (John 8:58), the great shepherd of Psalm 23 (John 10:11), the Brazen Serpent in the wilderness who was lifted up on a pole to provide healing for all (John 3:14-15), etc.

On the road to Emmaus, Jesus told the two disciples, "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He (Christ) INTERPRETED to them in ALL THE SCRIPTURES the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?" Luke 24:26-27, 31-32.

Now, we know that Jesus is LITERALLY nowhere explicitly to be found by name in the Old Testament. But, ALLEGORICALLY, He is everywhere to be found. Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to these two highly blessed disciples. And their "hearts burned within them" as they finally understood the true importance of the Old Testament.

Paul was clear that the Old Testament literal events were prophetic pre-figures, or rough types, of a later New Testament reality revealed in and through Jesus Christ, who fills all things. Paul frequently established this divine dynamic. He wrote that Biblical revelations occur FIRST in the natural (the Old Testament), the truer and deeper meanings of which are THEN unveiled in the Spiritual (the New Testament). 1 Corinthians 15:46.

Let's look at some examples. Literal foreskin-circumcision in the Old becomes spiritual heart-circumcision in the New (Romans 2:29). Keeping

the literal-Sabbath in the Old becomes instead a spiritual-Sabbath of abiding in divine rest in the New (Hebrews 4:4-11). The Law written on literal tablets of stone in the Old becomes the Law of Christ's love written on the spiritual tablets of our heart in the New (2 Corinthians 3:3-9).

The Israelite's literal baptism of walking through the waters of the Red Sea in the Old becomes a type of our spiritual baptism in the Red Sea of Jesus' saving blood in the New (1 Corinthians 10:1-6). The literal temple in the Old becomes the spiritual temple of our living bodies in the New (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). And the list goes on and on.

In short, when they read Old Testament passages, they were "inspired" or "in-spirited" to intuit the better meaning as it related to Christ.

Those were the good old days of unleavened reading.

Chapter Sixty-Six

Avoid ignorant assertions by diving into subtext.

Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext.

"Ignorant assertions about God appear to be nothing else but this: that Scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter." Origen, On First Principles 4:2.1-2, 4.

In other words, Origen says that ignoring the Scripture's subtext is ignoring its best and deepest meanings.

So to avoid making "ignorant assertions" about God's character, we need to go deep diving into the subtext of Scripture.

The text, on various occasions, may perfectly or imperfectly describe historical events from a human perspective.

However, embedded within the "subtext" are additional Christological meanings which are to be prioritized and internalized for our benefit today, here, and now.

The author David Baboulene, in his practical academic work on Story Theory - The Story Book - defines SUBTEXT as "the result of any form of gap in knowledge between any of the participants in a story; for example, between the author and a character, between two characters, or between the audience and at least one character."

Baboulene's above quote on subtext is crucial BECAUSE it explains one of the least understood aspects of accurate Biblical reading.

Because the Bible is INSPIRED by God but literally WRITTEN by men, there is always a "GAP IN KNOWLEDGE" between what that writer CONTEXTUALLY and PARTIALLY knows about when he is writing, VERSUS what the Lord PERFECTLY and COMPLETELY knows about the ENTIRE situation.

As the great church father Origen noted, the Biblical writers spiritually "wrote" more than they contextually "knew." Until we appreciate that wondrous dynamic, we will still be vulnerable to lapsing into "lazy literalism."

Why on earth do we LIMIT the text of Scripture to ONLY what the human writer knew at only the ancient time he wrote it?

Why not rather UNLIMIT the text by allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us on any and every level imaginable by any and all means He deems advisable, available, and profitable in the here and now. This dynamic of ongoing and ever-fluid revelation is at the very core of subtext.

Earnest Hemingway, one of the greatest writers of all time, and Konstantin Stanislavski, one of the greatest acting teachers of all time, both believed that the vast majority of worth and meaning of ANY written work came from its subtext.

Like the iceberg mentioned above, which science says has 90% of its entire mass unseen and underwater, so too does the richness of all great writing come from the "non-literal" subtext.

You see, great writers seldom "explicitly" and "literally" convey what they want to say in linear ABC fashion. They don't cross every "t" and dot every "i." Rather, they leave much "unsaid" and "unclear."

The reason?

They want the reader to invest their hearts and minds in the writing in order to become treasure hunters who join the author's quest. And oft times the reader will find treasure of which the human author was unaware, at least consciously.

Great authors seek to elicit the wholeheartedness of the reader, a wholeheartedness that does not come if every little thing is literally spelled out for them. This requires no fervent effort or deep investment on the part of the reader because it's all legalistically spelled out for them.

Rather, these great writers use allegory, suggestion, implication, inference, metaphor, imagery, and intuition. They let the words "breathe" in our minds and hearts, so that our imagination and emotions can salivate, meditate, and expand into new heartfelt territory.

Umberto Ecco said, “A good book is always smarter than its (human) author.” So too is the “good book” smarter than its human authors. Within the subtext, we find that the water is purer and far more pristine. When we drink it, we find the “sensus plenior” of Scripture.

"The sensus plenior is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development

in the understanding of revelation." Raymond E. Brown, The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture (Baltimore: St. Mary's University, 1955), p 92.

Chapter Sixty-Seven

Purge all the paralyzing polarities out of our image of God.

It's vital to purge all the paralyzing polarities out of our image of God.

The Old Testament, in its literal reading, appears to paint God as BOTH the bringer of evil and sender of good, as BOTH the wrathful smiter and forgiving King, and as BOTH the cruel afflicter and generous healer of men.

And while there are numerous allegorical/Christological ways to reinterpret those passages, the literal reading level must also be dealt with using New Testament wisdom. Otherwise, we are left with a bipolar, fickle,

Janus-faced deity who, in the final analysis, is unlovable, unappeasable, and unknowable.

When Jesus "saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning," I believe one aspect of this amazing statement spoke to the theological "purging away" of the Satanic qualities the Old Testament had wrongly attributed to God, at least on the literal level of its writings.

In other words, Jesus came to differentiate, evolve, renovate, and purify the Old Testament "letter" into New Testament "better." He saw all Satanic qualities "fall" from our heavenly image of God.

Jesus, during His incarnation, reveals God's nature as non-dualistic. God, after Jesus has removed all Satanic qualities, is revealed as:

--a plague remover, not a plague sender

--a storm stopper, not a storm causer

--a death raiser, not a death dealer

--an oppression healer, not an oppression bringer

--an ever-present help in time of need, not a never-present help in time of need

--a bottomless fount of mercy and renewal, not a volcano of wrath and revenge.

On the mount of transfiguration, upon seeing Moses and Elijah transfigured alongside Jesus, the disciples asked if they should now build theological temples to all three-- to Jesus, to the law-giver Moses, and the prophet Elijah. The Father answers from heaven, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

Here, Abba makes it clear that Jesus is the SOLE lens, the SOLE voice, the SOLE heart, and the SOLE mind we are to listen to regarding all things divine.

Jesus— by what He ministered, taught, and modeled— completely sundered, separated, and slung away all Satanic attributes from our New Covenant image of God. "Peace on earth, goodwill to man!" heralded a new and better understanding of the divine nature.

Chapter Sixty-Eight

God is lightness. All else is mere commentary.

God is love. God is light. God is lightness. All else is mere commentary.

The Holy Spirit auto-corrects any "dead letter" Bible reading that seems to "literally" malign or muddy the character of God. Paul tells us as much in 2 Corinthians 3:6 when we are told the "letter kills but the Spirit gives life."

Just make sure to always download the "Holy Spirit Reading App" into your heart and mind. This App will then serve to lift the "hermeneutical veil" which, "still to this day," seeks to keep us blind in dead-letter

literalism whenever "the Old Testament is read" without the Spirit's interpretive illumination.

Chapter Sixty-Nine

Houston, we have a hermeneutical problem here.

Either God both commanded and caused all the Old Testament atrocities Moses and the other Old Testament saints attributed to Him (including mass rape, genocide, and infanticide)..... or He didn't.

I unapologetically propose that He didn't. Here is why. If Jesus had NEVER commanded or caused these atrocities, then so too the Father would NEVER have caused or commanded either.

Let's not simply ignore these Old Testament passages, such as the ones referred to above. They are faith-killers.

We can either reinterpret them allegorically or we can continue to read them literally. Or we can do both.

If we interpret them on a literal level, the answer is simple. The Old Testament saints had an undifferentiated view of God, which still contained satanic qualities, cruel qualities, which Jesus later saw drop from heaven when He saw His disciples curing and caring rather than condemning and killing.

Because of their hyper-sovereign view of God, the Old Testament saints wrongly believed that Satan was God's left hand of wrath, His angry voice, His minister of wrath, His obedient enforcing angel just dutifully carrying out His orders. They confused "the anger of God" as "the destructions of Satan." This caused them to join satanic qualities to the hip of their image of God. Judaism still today retains this view of GOD and Satan. This applies regardless of whether we choose to see Satan as a dark angelic “who” or a dark dynamical “what.”

This exact dynamic occurred in an Old Testament event recorded BOTH in 2 Samuel 24:1 and I Chronicles 21:1, where 70,000 Israelites died because of David's sin in numbering Israel.

In the Samuel version of events, "the wrath of the Lord" caused David to sin.

But the Chronicles version claims that "Satan provoked David" to sin.

We know that the Chronicles passage better aligns with what Jesus taught us about Satan as the author and finisher of our sin (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8). Thus, here we redivide the literal, "BY THE LETTER," reading of Samuel in favor of a higher spiritual reading.

The point is that if Scripture ever mistakenly calls "Satan's destructions" the "wrath of God," then we are compelled to correct and clarify the passage under the authority of 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

The same thing that frequently went on with Moses (and the other OT saints) goes on with us today— they (and we) strike the rock of revelation with wrath instead of speaking to it in love. And in so doing, they (and we) fail to sanctify the Lord's nature/name. They (and we) project our own inner carnal anger (which is always being provoked, augmented, and enflamed by Satanic suggestion) onto the divine impulses they (and we) have been receiving.

The result? A distorted and bipolar message that misrepresented and maligned the divine nature.

I love and appreciate Moses. But Moses had serious issues. If we don't recognize his issues, we will likely duplicate them in ourselves. And that's the last thing God wants for us.

One issue was that Moses had an anger problem. Another issue was that Moses had a developmental limitation that

hindered and, on occasion, distorted his perception of God.

Exodus 33:18-23 tells us Moses could not get a 360-degree view of God's goodness. When Moses attempted to see the Lord's goodness, he could only see it from behind and at an angled distance. Why? What was the issue here? If we only see someone's character from behind and at a distance, it can be rightly questioned how well we really know that person.

Again, the problem with Moses is that he did not have a full frontal view of God's goodness, revealed only in Jesus Christ, so he could not process and manifest the true nature of God accurately and without distortion. Moses would often fill in the gaps of what he didn't know about God's nature with his own wrath and suppositions.

Moses lacked Christ's indwelling righteousness and thus lacked the developmental ability to perceive God in pure form. Moses may have been the meekest man in the land in his own righteousness, but that was still woefully inadequate to accurately carry and convey the righteousness which is of Jesus.

Here is the reason. Moses had a huge ANGER problem (Numbers 20:1-12; Exodus 2:11-14), which ultimately poisoned his ability to faithfully translate God's character to the people.

In fact, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of this very reason---he angrily misrepresented the nature of God. Numbers 20:1-12 tells the story. Sadly, Moses can do no wrong in many people's eyes, even if Scripture notoriously declares it. Moses' accuracy, according to some literalists, must NEVER be questioned, not even by Jesus.

So when the Father tells the disciples that Jesus, not Moses or Elijah, is the one they are to "hear," literalists have no explanation other than just to ignore the implications of that passage altogether. I really attempt to explain every passage literalists raise to me, but they don't return the courtesy and leave my cited passages largely unaddressed.

Paul tells us the Old Testament gives us negative examples NOT to follow. Literalists, by contrast, see all OT passages as examples TO follow. And that is where we differ.

Here is the key passage on Moses' developmental issues. God instructed Moses in Numbers 20 to speak to a desert rock, supernaturally commanding it to gush out water for His parched people. What a miracle of love God sought to display for His people!

But Moses then wrongly mixed God's word with his own frustration and anger at the people. Instead of speaking to the rock, Moses violently struck the rock with his rod, thus giving the people the impression that God Himself was angry and disgusted with them. The water did gush,

but in a spirit of terror rather than the spirit of awe and love God intended. No wonder the people so feared God's temper and wrath.

Makes you wonder how many other times what Moses shared as the word of God was partially tinged with his own wrath. This sin can't be overemphasized, for it is what kept Moses OUT OF THE PROMISED LAND INHERITANCE. "And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, BECAUSE YE BELIEVED ME NOT, TO SANCTIFY ME IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, therefore YE SHALL NOT BRING THIS CONGREGATION INTO THE LAND WHICH I HAVE GIVEN THEM." Numbers 20:12.

The early church caught on to this dynamic quickly and knew these brutal OT passages could not possibly be accurate in what they were describing, both as coming from the Lord's mouth and from His causative hand. They knew if Jesus never talked this way, then neither could the Godhead speak and act this way in the Old Testament. The early church fathers acted decisively in reinterpreting all these brutal OT Bible passages, which on their surface attributed satanic qualities to God's causative hand or commanding voice. Consider the following quotes by the fathers.

"And so, since these things cannot without horrible sacrilege be literally understood of him who is declared by the authority of Holy Scripture to be invisible,

ineffable, incomprehensible, simple, and uncomposite, the disturbance of anger (not to mention wrath) cannot be attributed to that immutable nature without monstrous blasphemy." John Cassian, Institutes 8:4.

So, on a literal level, the church fathers knew these passages misrepresented God's nature as revealed in Jesus and thus were not to be so read. There had to be a deeper level of allegorical meaning that would make these passages beneficial to New Covenant believers. Simply put, the dead letter reading of these passages was simply unacceptable.

By contrast, if we reinterpret these passages allegorically, we will see that this is how the early church fathers would have read this passage, not literally but allegorically. They knew that the only thing God destroys is evil notions, not evil nations. The only babies that the divine Spirit bashes are our own childish thoughts and infantile ideas, not living children themselves. God's Spirit may impale our own inner images of evil, but no men made in the image of God would ever be so treated. The only things God Spirit would ravish and impregnate would be mental and spiritual strongholds within us, which have impoverished us because they lack the seed-life of Christ.

Much of what Satan did and said in the Old Testament is recorded as coming from Yahweh. Isaiah, for instance, quotes God, in the first person no less, as confessing to causing and commanding the rape of all Babylonian

women, the bashing to death of all Babylonian infants against the rocks, and the "merciless" impaling of all Babylonian male children. This is Satanic activity in every age. The Lord changes not.

What is troubling is that many literalists have previously told me they don't believe God caused or commanded rape, despite the fact that Isaiah quotes God in the first person as confessing to causing exactly THAT atrocity. So they are willing to say that the passage by Isaiah (certainly an OT figure of similar stature to Moses) commanding rape is not from the Lord. But, in an entirely inconsistent take, Vance is totally willing to accept that God's confession in the same Isaiah passage to causing and commanding the infanticidal bashing of Babylonian babies' heads against the rocks and the mass impaling of Babylonian children without mercy— IS perfectly acceptable and is at God's hand. So many seem to arbitrarily accept some OT Scripture quoting God in the first person while rejecting others, as he sees fit. Vance knows he can't coherently preach a rapist God, so he simply edits it out of the Bible as not of God. So to see him attack my hermeneutic, one which the early fathers richly used, because I dare challenge Moses when he attributes satanic qualities to God, is a little disingenuous. He does the same thing with Isaiah. The rape and infanticide passage from Isaiah is quoted and exegeted in the links below.

I'm sure we would never use this passage to tell our kids JESUS is a child-killing rapist. We intuitively know it's not true. There was confusion in the Old Testament, which saw them wrongly believe Satan (and his destructive and deceptive nature) were part of God's nature. Satan was seen as God's left hand of destruction, God's angry voice, God's minister of wrath, an obedient servant angel just following God's orders.

Jesus came in the New Testament and corrected this error by showing Satan as a cosmic rebel acting off the grid and without divine sanction. Jesus NEVER used the Law to kill or rape anybody. Satan is the source of Moses' anger and his subsequent and ongoing failure to sanctify the name/nature of God. So serious was this sin that it kept Moses from entering the promised land. Once we insert the proper role of Satan back into the Old Testament narratives, we see his activity often mislabeled as "the wrath of God."

Chapter Seventy

Here is a huge hermeneutical mind-blower.

Does the Holy Spirit HELP and INFORM our INTUITION to hear the promptings of the Spirit regarding various Biblical subtexts which may be non-apparent to the naked eye?

Oh yes. And here is the best example.

"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in ALL the Scriptures the things concerning himself.... They (later) said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'.... Then He (Jesus) said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to

you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" Luke 24:27, 32, 44-45.

Here is a huge hermeneutical mind-blower. The Emmaus-road disciples at first did NOT understand how ALL the law, ALL the prophets, and ALL the writings of the Old Testament always spoke primarily of Jesus (Luke 24:27, 32, 44-45).

It was non-apparent to the naked and literal eye of these disciples just HOW Jesus was somehow embedded in every OT Scripture.

That is, until Jesus took them on an intuitive journey of discovery through the Scriptures, where He revealed Himself to them EVERYWHERE.

These passages certainly did NOT literally speak of Jesus in any discernible way. But once the Christological Spirit was applied, all the passages started blossoming in new and mystical ways.

Both Paul, the early Jewish exegetes, and the early church fathers called this reading style ALLEGORICAL. Here, the text may mean "more than what the text literally says" or "other than what the text literally says," but it will always lend itself to a Christological reading.

Galatians 4 is the clearest example where Paul allegorizes Sarah and Hagar as types of the New and Old covenants (Galatians 4:22-31). Nothing could have been less apparent on its Old Testament literal face than was this Pauline reading, but Paul intuited this application with great clarity and certainty.

Chapter Seventy-One

Paul allegorized the Old Testament all the time.

The problem is NOT that an allegorical reading of the Old Testament is improper, for Paul allegorized it all the time and may have even invented the word "allegory" in Galatians 4.

The problem, rather, is that the allegorical approach to reading the Old Testament, which Paul and the early church fathers used, is poorly understood. They had safeguards that many today have abandoned.

They NEVER suggested that Jesus Himself was a metaphor of anything. Instead, they said much of the Old Testament was a metaphor for Jesus.

Even Jesus told His disciples on the Road to Emmaus that all the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Him in some non-apparent way. He then explained it to them, an explanation which caused their hearts to burn within them.

Allegory just says there can be an ADDITIONAL "other than" or "more than" meaning embedded within the literal Old Testament Biblical passage, which the Spirit can now help us extract. The additional deeper meaning always points to Christ in some symbolic way.

Christo-allegory, then, is a particular type of allegory that routes the symbolic meaning of certain types of Old Testament Biblical texts to refer to some aspect of Christ and His kingdom of light.

It's important to limit the use of Christo-allegory to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the "type," "shadow," and "prefigurement" of Christ, while the New Testament is the actual arrival of the light.

Thus, we never allegorize the New Testament unless it specifically presents itself as an allegory, such as in the Parables or the book of Revelation.

Paul (after his conversion) and the other New Testament writers took a qualitatively different approach with the narratives recorded in the Gospels and the book of Acts.

The historicity of these passages was REPEATEDLY stressed. In the first person, these writers repeatedly emphasized that they actually touched, heard, and beheld the lives and works of Jesus (or his apostles) with their own eyes. See 1 Peter 5:1, 2 Peter 1:16-17, 1 John 1:1-3, Luke 1:1-4, Acts 1:1-3.

Thus, no New Testament writer ever allegorizes the narratives of the Gospels or Acts (which, though not yet canonized, were already widely established by oral traditions). Yet they all profusely Christo-allegorized the Old Testament.

Both the New Testament writers and the vast majority of the early church fathers ALL profusely practiced allegory when reading the Old Testament.

Hope this helps clarify when allegory is appropriate and when it is not.

Chapter Seventy-Two

Here are 50 examples of New Testament writers allegorizing the Old Testament.

50 examples where the New Testament allegorizes Old Testament passages

Allegorizing much of the Old Testament "beyond" its plain meaning is problematic for some, but when we look at HOW the New Testament writers reference the Old Testament, they constantly employ an allegorical reading.

"Allegory is language that says one thing and means either something MORE than what it says or something OTHER than what it says." Theologian R.A. Norris, in his article on "Allegory" in THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO ORIGEN.

1) The Israelites' wilderness Manna from Heaven is allegorized as Jesus, the bread of life. John 6:48-60.

2) The OT Passover Lamb of God is allegorized as Jesus. 1 Corinthians 5:7; John 1:29, 36.

3) Jacob's Ladder in Genesis is allegorized as Jesus, on whom angels ascend/descend. John 1:51.

4) Sarah allegorized as the New Covenant. Galatians 4:22-31.

5) Hagar allegorized as the Old Covenant. Galatians 4:22-31.

6) Isaac allegorized as a New Covenant believer. Galatians 4:22-31.

7) Ishmael allegorized as an Old Covenant legalistic believer. Galatians 4:22-31.

8) OT leaven allegorized as NT legalism and hypocrisy. Galatians 5:3-9.

9) Earthly Jerusalem is allegorized as a heavenly city. Galatians 4:26.

10) The rock that poured water in the wilderness is allegorized as Christ.1 Cor. 10:4.

11) The Genesis serpent is allegorized as Satan. Revelation 12:9.

12) Adam is an allegory (type) of Christ. Romans 5:14-19.

13) The Melchizedek priesthood is allegorized as Jesus' superior priesthood to that of the Levitical. Heb . 5-7.

14) OT priesthood is allegorized as shadows of heavenly things. Hebrews 8:4-5.

15) The tabernacle is allegorized as a shadow of the true heavenly Sanctuary. Heb. 8:1-5.

16) Sanctuary furniture is allegorized as heavenly symbols. Hebrews 9:1-15.

17) The Law is an allegorical shadow of good things to come, not the very image. Heb. 10:1.

18) Circumcision is allegorized as an inner heart transformation. Romans 2:28-29.

19) The Sabbath is allegorized as a state of divine being. Hebrews 4:1-11.

20) The OT Eve-bride is allegorized as the spiritual body and bride of Christ. 1Cor. 12:27; 2Cor. 11:2-3. Ephesians 5:22-33.

21) The Temple is allegorized as Jesus' earthly body, the way into the Holy of Holies. Jn. 2:19.

22) The Temple is also allegorized as our earthly bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:19.

23) Paul allegorizes the Israelites' physical journey into the Church's spiritual journey. 1 Corinthians 10:2-7; Galatians 3:7; Romans 6:3.

24) The sign of Jonah is allegorized as Jesus' three days buried in the earth's belly. Matthew 12:38-41.

25) Moses, in his symbolic role of prophet, leader, and mediator for Jehovah's people, is an allegory of shadow pointing to Jesus who functions in a similar, though more exalted, capacity (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22; 1 Corinthians 10:2; Galatians 3:27; 3:19; 1 Timothy 2:5).

26) Moses also has many parallel events in his life that point to his prefiguring Jesus allegorically.

Both Moses and Jesus survived the killing of all male children.

Both Moses and Jesus are exiles in a foreign land until an evil king dies.

Both Moses and Jesus return from the foreign land to rescue their people.

Both Moses and Jesus led their people on an Exodus journey.

Both Moses and Jesus fasted for forty days.

Both Moses and Jesus are transfigured.

Both Moses and Jesus were raised by men who were not their blood fathers.

Their family misunderstands both Moses and Jesus.

Both Moses and Jesus intercede for the sins of their people.

Both Moses and Jesus are willing to die for the sins of their people.

Both Moses and Jesus commissioned a successor/successors.

Both Moses and Jesus commanded raging waters.

27) Zion typifies the Church and finally heaven (cf. Galatians 4:25, 26; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21:2).

28) Babylon, which held God's people captive in the Old Testament, allegorizes the condition of an apostate church that has departed from the simplicity of the New Testament pattern (Revelation 11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2ff).

29) The brazen serpent, lifted up in the wilderness, through which the people found physical healing (Numbers 21:8), was allegorized as the lifted-up Christ

(John 3:14; 12:32), through whom spiritual healing comes (Isaiah 53:5).

30) The deliverance of Noah's family from a corrupted world, by means of "water," allegorizes our salvation, through baptism, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 3:20-21; Colossians 1:13).

31) The creation of light on the first day of Earth's history (Genesis 1:3) allegorizes the coming brilliant illumination of the gospel of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6).

32) Adam and Eve are an allegory of Christ and the Church. From Adam's rib came his bride. 1 Timothy 2:13-14. From Christ's pierced rib pours forth His spirit-bride, the Church. Paul unveiled this great allegorical mystery when he revealed that AS Eve was TO Adam, so IS the Church TO Christ. Ephesians 5:23-33.

33) Adam also becomes BOTH an allegory of contrast and comparison to Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 and 45-48, where Adam is described as a living soul IN WHOM all die, whereas Christ is a life-quickening spirit IN WHOM all are made alive. Paul picks up this same theme in Romans when he states that Adam introduced sin into the world, whereas through Christ system of righteousness was made available for mankind (Romans 5:19).

34) The mysterious Melchizedek and King David were both allegorical types of Christ as priest and Christ

as earthly king. Melchizedek, who was both King of Salem and a High Priest of God—at the same time (Genesis 14:18-20)—was an allegorical type of Christ. David also both wore a kingly crown and famously ate the shewbread reserved only for priests. These two Old Testament types reveal the dual nature of Jesus, NOW serving as our King and High Priest. Jesus, at his ascension, began to reign on David's throne and to SIMULTANEOUSLY function as our high priest (cf. Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:12, 13; Hebrews 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17).

35) Three offices in the Old Testament allegorize Jesus' kingdom anointing. Prophets (1 Kings 19:16), priests (Exodus 28:41), and kings (1 Samuel 10:1) were anointed in allegorical anticipation of the coming of the anointed one who is prophet (Acts 3:22), priest (Hebrews 3:1), and king (Revelation 17:14).

36) Many institutions of the Old Testament era were allegorical shadows of good things to come. The Passover with its spotless lamb (Exodus 12:5) was to be slain "between the two evenings" (12:6 ASVfn), i.e., between three and five P.M., without any bones being broken (12:46). It was an allegory of the death of Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7), who was without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19), who died at about three P.M. (Matthew 27:46), and who had none of his bones broken (John 19:33ff).

37) The feast of the firstfruits (Leviticus 23:10), i.e., Pentecost, was a celebration in which the initial produce of the harvest was offered to God as a token of the full crop to follow. This ritual allegorized : (1) the early influx of the Jews into the Church of Christ (Romans 11:16); and (2) the resurrection of Jesus as God's pledge of the general resurrection to ultimately come (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

38) The feast of the tabernacles was an allegory to commemorate Israel's sojourn in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:43). But it was also designed to remind us that we are but sojourners on this earth (1 Peter 2:11), and that someday we will lay aside this earthly tabernacle (2 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Peter 1:13, 14) for a more permanent abiding place (cf. Hebrews 11:9-13).

39) The burning bush of Exodus is an allegory of Christ. God revealed Himself as the great "I Am" In Exodus 3 with Moses at the Burning Bush. Jesus refers to Himself as the "I Am" on at least eight separate occasions, thus now personifying the Burning Bush allegory. In each of those eight occasions, the wording in the original Greek is the same. Jesus refers to Himself not simply as "I am" but literally as "I, I Am". The phrase could be legitimately translated as "I and I alone" or "I and no one else". The words He chose are emphatic.

40) In 1 Cor. 14:21, Paul took an Old Testament passage which on its face had nothing to do with New Testament

tongues (Is. 28:11-12), and allegorized it into a prophetic passage for the spiritual gift of tongues.

41) The author of Hebrews also allegorized animal sacrifices from being useless rituals under the bare letter of the law to a wonderful prophetic image of Christ's perfect ransom paid for all under the spiritual reading of the passage. Heb. 10:1-10.

42) Peter and Paul both allegorized Old Testament dietary laws by integrating faith and thanksgiving into the true spiritual diet. (Acts. 11:5-10; Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Tim. 4:3-4).

43) Peter, in Acts 2:16-17, allegorized Joel 2:28-29 to refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

44) Colossians 2:17 allegorizes the OT festivals, holy days, and dietary laws as "shadows" of "the body of Christ" to come, again not the literal thing itself but a prophetic shadow of the Kingdom of God.

45) Jesus allegorized Psalm 22 in Matthew 27:46 when He was on the cross, prosopologically usurping the dialogue there as His own.

46) Jesus allegorized Ps 118.26 in Mt 23.39 when He prosopologically usurped the statement in the Psalm as His own rather than that of the OT speaker.

47) Jesus allegorized Ps 41.9 in John 13.18 by prosopologically usurping this Scripture to be His own statement regarding Judas.

48) Jesus allegorized Ps 35.19, 69.4 in John 15.25 by prosopologically usurping the description there to decry the people's groundless hatred of Him.

49) Mt. Sinai is allegorized as the Old Covenant in Galatians 4:22-31.

50) Mt. Zion is allegorized as the New Covenant in Galatians 4:22-31.

Chapter Seventy-Three

Want to read Old Testament Scripture like the early Christian church Fathers and Mothers?

It's really easy. And, ironically, it's a modern invention that models this ancient art form.

Here it is: we are reading Old Testament Scripture narratives in the same way we would watch a modern-day movie.

Any good movie watcher evaluates the narrative initially on its surface level, but then always goes deeper by internalizing and allegorizing the experience. We do this

by converting the character, themes, and imagery from the movie to apply to our own lives today, here, and now.

ROCKY inspires US to get up and defy the odds (NOT to beat our enemies into a bloody pulp).

THE MATRIX inspires US to wake up, question reality, and seek deeper truth (NOT to "shoot up" and "slice up" people).

STAR WARS inspires US to believe that there is a greater power available to enable and ennoble US (NOT to levitate physical objects or manipulate weak minds).

And the list goes on...

Almost every quality movie seeks to inspire each and all of us to believe in better, brighter, and nobler things. Anybody can watch a movie and internalize various levels of inspiration— even children— according to their respective abilities and focus.

Once we see how each instinctively allegorizes music and movies on a daily basis, the question doesn't become, "What IS allegory?", but rather, "What is NOT allegory?"

Every written narrative of any event becomes allegorical the moment we try to internalize and apply its subtext to our own lives. Strictly historical readings CAN be read as a search to understand the facts of what events occurred, the order in which they occurred, and the empirically

provable contributing causes of those events. But, if this is ALL that Old Testament narratives are intended to convey, then they really have no practical application for us today, here, and now--- that is, unless we allegorize them.

Take a narrative of an exciting boxing match, whether it be from a movie, book, article, or speech. Boxing, literally and historically speaking, has absolutely nothing to do with most of our personal lives. Yet, the moment we become inspired and internally moved, a boxing story, whether it's true (Ali) or fictional (Rocky Balboa) or a mythical mixture of fact and fiction ("Cinderella Man" James Braddock), we automatically start applying it to our subjective lives and internal processes.

For me, the courtroom becomes the boxing ring, or battling hopelessness, or battling sickness, or battling any kind of adversity. Refusing to be knocked down and out, rising again and again, not surrendering, stoking courage, all come from the fruit of boxing-inspired allegory.

If I were restricted to just the historical and literal reading, I would be forbidden to so penetrate any text or any narrative for such internal inspiration and application. A book that helped me expand my understanding of allegory along these lines was “Allegorizing History: The Venerable Bede, Figural Exegesis, and Historical Theory” by Timothy J. Furry.

Historians largely allegorize history in their writings when they go beyond the clinically provable facts, and start re-speculating/reinterpreting /reinventing the order, meanings, dynamics, and causations from a skeleton of cloudy, disputed, and largely unprovable facts.

Allegory, by contrast, transfigures spiritually-inspired narratives into examples we are to internalize for our benefit today-here-now. Allegorical readings produce epiphanies of faith, courage, and hope, as well as cautionary flares of dynamics to avoid.

Regardless of the accuracy of the far removed events, cultural nuances, and often convoluted scenarios, we can either take the text out of its historical context, or keep it in its historical context, but either way, still THEN take the narrative into allegorical heights and internal depths.

Let's be frank. On a strictly historical basis, the precise factual and linear accuracy of Israel's history is largely irrelevant to ANY facet of our lives today.

But, allegory transfigures the text to now be completely inspiring and applicable to us in EVERY facet of our lives. Allegory is the bridge over which historical fact transfigures into personal and internal application.

Once we see this, then what ISN'T allegorical? History, literature, entertainment, music-- everything that inspires you to act, think, or believe differently is

basically an "allegory bridge" your heart has crossed from the objective external to the subjective internal.

Christo-allegorizing doesn't necessarily mean the narrative is or isn't historical, just that there is an embedded spiritual and symbolic meaning within the story that points to Christ altogether apart from its historicity. Jesus told us on the Emmaus Road that the spiritual meaning of all the Law, all the Prophets, and all the Wisdom Writings find their hermeneutical rest in Him.

It's like going to the movies.

Chapter Seventy-Four

The difference between context, subtext, and supertext.

Many of us are never taught the difference between these three important words: context, subtext, and supertext.

Simply put, context refers to the surface conditions of what the text literally says. Subtext is what the text spiritually means deep underneath its surface meaning. Supertext is how the particular text aligns with the overall flow of the Bible.

The image of an iceberg helps here. CONTEXT is that part of an iceberg visible above the water. SUBTEXT is the larger part of the iceberg beneath the water.

SUPERTEXT is the direction and location the entire iceberg is flowing.

Now, consider the Bible. Scripture's CONTEXT is what the text literally appears to say, taking into account the facts we historically know about the author and his surroundings. Scripture's SUBTEXT is the spiritual meaning God wants us to extract FROM the text by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, Scripture's SUPERTEXT is how and in what direction the overall Bible flows on the topic in question.

If one ONLY reads for context, that person suffers from spiritual nearsightedness, which prevents them from going deep, far, and high in the truths of God. If one ONLY reads for subtext, that person may still be greatly blessed but miss the richness of Biblical history. And, if one ONLY reads for supertext, that person can overlook NEW and FRESH manna because they are too focused on other scriptures.

In Bible reading, CONTEXT is "milk," SUBTEXT is "meat," and SUPERTEXT is the "menu" from which the "order" and importance of the food courses is revealed—with the Old Testament comprising spiritual appetizers and the New Testament forming the main entree.

We need to appreciate milk, but prefer meat, and always remember to consult the menu so that we know the order of each course is to be considered and consumed.

All three “texts” are important, but THE most important text is SUBTEXT. God can, and often does, speak apart from context and supertext, BUT Scriptural subtext is ALWAYS the heart of the matter.

Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext. Subtext.

The author David Baboulene, in his practical academic work on Story Theory — The Story Book — defines SUBTEXT as "the result of any form of gap in knowledge between any of the participants in a story; for example, between the author and a character, between two characters or between the audience and at least one character."

Baboulene's above quote on subtext is crucial BECAUSE it explains one of the least understood aspects of accurate Biblical reading. Because the Bible is INSPIRED by God but literally WRITTEN by men, there is always a "GAP IN KNOWLEDGE" between what that writer CONTEXTUALLY and PARTIALLY knows about when he is writing, VERSUS what the Lord PERFECTLY and COMPLETELY knows about the ENTIRE situation. As the great church father Origen noted, the Biblical writers spiritually "wrote" more than they contextually "knew." Until we appreciate that wondrous dynamic, we will still be vulnerable to lapsing into "lazy literalism."

Why on earth do we LIMIT the text of Scripture to ONLY what the human writer knew at only the ancient time he wrote it? Why not rather UNLIMIT the text by allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to us on any and every level imaginable by any and all means He deems advisable, available, and profitable in the here and now. This dynamic of ongoing and ever-fluid revelation is at the very core of subtext.

Earnest Hemingway, one of the greatest writers of all time, and Konstantin.

Stanislavski, one of the greatest acting teachers of all time, and Hemingway both believed that the vast majority of worth and meaning of ANY written work came from its subtext. Like the iceberg mentioned above, which science says has 90% of its entire mass unseen and underwater, so too does the richness of all great writing come from the "non-literal" subtext.

You see, great writers seldom "explicitly" and "literally" convey what they want to say in linear ABC fashion. They don't cross every "t" and dot every "i." Rather, they leave much "unsaid" and "unclear." The reason? They want the reader to invest their hearts and minds in the writing in order to become treasure hunters who join the author's quest.

Great authors seek to elicit the wholeheartedness of the reader, a wholeheartedness that does not come if every little thing is literally spelled out for them. This requires

no fervent effort or deep investment on the part of the reader because it's all legalistically spelled out for them. Rather, these great writers use allegory, suggestion, implication, inference, metaphor, imagery, and intuition. They let the words "breathe" in our minds and hearts, so that our imagination and emotions can salivate, meditate, and expand into new heartfelt territory.

So, the next time some hyper-literal reader of the Bible chastises you for not laboriously and legalistically knowing the "context" of the Scripture you are discussing, remind that person that the "Holy Spirit subtext" is FAR MORE important than the "mere human context," and that the "overall super-text" is JUST AS important as the "always-partial context." As a young Martin Luther said, "Scripture can rightly be understood solely by an influx of the Spirit." In other words, SPIRIT alone always supplies the all-important SUBTEXT. (Read 2 Corinthians 3 with fresh eyes and you will never be the same).

Many are wrongly taught to ALWAYS read Scripture ONLY in CONTEXT. Few are taught to read Scripture MAINLY through SUBTEXT. Fewer still are taught to connect the dots of all Scriptures so that they present a dynamic whole through SUPERTEXT. May we be the few who weave all three dynamics into the seamless cloak of the mind of Christ.

As an example, the Old Testament says many things which, if we read solely in CONTEXT, would require us to "literally" kill and hate our enemies, "literally" stone to death all rebellious children, "literally" stone to death all New Age believers and "literally" stone to death all Sabbath-breakers, even if all they did was pick up sticks on the Sabbath. Numbers 15:32-36; Exodus 21, 22, 31, 35; Leviticus 19, 20, 24; Numbers 35. But, we know that the SUPERTEXT of Scripture flows AWAY from Old Testament Wrath to New Testament Grace. So, if a particular verse's context points toward wrath, we know the SUPERTEXT trumps that narrow reading.

Moreover, the SUBTEXT of all these violent Old Testament verses now speaks deeper truths to us, truths that a mere CONTEXTUAL reading would never allow. With the Holy Spirit's leading, we know that Satan, not God, is the one who seeks to "stone us" with the condemnation of the Law. Satan is the "spirit of stoning" that demonically drives men to hate, revenge, and murder. Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't cause stonings; He prevents them. Jesus saves us from the stonings we don't deserve as well as the ones we do deserve. John 8.

All these "stoning" passages contain, for us today, SUBTEXTUAL warnings to avoid sins which give Satan greater access to stone us with affliction, oppression, and condemnation. Do you see how much richer the SUBTEXTUAL reading is here? Without it, the

CONTEXTUAL reading of these Scriptures would do nothing but HARDEN our image of God as a loveless executioner.

Quite honestly, I get a little nauseous when legalistic Christians throw "penalty flags" on believers who get fresh "rhema" revelation from the SUBTEXT of Scripture. These "wet blankets" say that ONLY a CONTEXTUAL reading of Scripture is allowed. That is ridiculous. Neither of the two greatest early Christian thinkers, Augustine nor Origen, believed that. Nor should we. They believed the Scriptures were to be read PRIMARILY for SUBTEXT, and only secondarily for CONTEXT.

So, let's review.

Using the glacier analogy, the ten percent clearly and literally seen above the surface of Scripture is the context. The 90 percent unseen is the "rhema" subtext, which dwells underneath Scripture and can only be seen when quickened by the Holy Spirit. Lastly, the supertext is where the entire glacier of Scripture is moving toward, which means the overall "logos" destination. This destination, I believe, to always be the goodness of God summed up in Jesus Christ. Every Scripture is headed that way, always headed that way.

Let me give a concrete example of applying these dynamics to the Old Testament Scripture. The supertext arises to help me understand the Old Testament passages

where God appears violent. The more we follow subsequent New Testament Scripture, the more we see an overall move away from divine violence, so that by the time we get Matthew 5:38-48, we see the glacier has moved a long way to a different ocean altogether.

Knowing this, whenever we see Old Testament verses promoting violence, we now know the supertext points ahead to a greater revelation, a progressive revelation of God's perfect goodness. Thus, supertext helps us not misunderstand the OT text and so get dragged back to wrath.

Now, the subtext of those violent verses still means something, just not literally so. For instance, the Old Testament passage of Joshua putting his foot on the necks of the five enemy kings and then executing them can now be seen as Jesus putting His spiritual foot on the five strongholds which have afflicted all our lives to varying degrees--- lust, fear, anger, pride, and disbelief. Jesus then, as he yields to His power, executes these five hindering presences from our inner thought life. We ourselves can now draw inner confidence and courage to fight the inner enemies of our soul in the way the New Testament confirms, NOT with carnal weapons, but with weapons of righteousness in our right hand and left. 2 Corinthians 6:7; 2 Corinthians 10 3 6. The context, by contrast, is just the literal meaning the OT author meant, his literal OT perspective.

So, the next time someone accuses you of violating the "context" of the Bible, bring up the word "subtext" and see their head-scratching begin. And maybe, just maybe, they will start to see a better way to read Scripture.

Chapter Seventy-Five

Some may have missed the memo.

Those who say we are not to allegorize the Old Testament "missed the memo" from the New Testament, which says that is exactly what we ARE to do— allegorize the Old Testament with the love and light of Christ.

The Apostle Paul LITERALLY (and ironically) told us to ALLEGORIZE, and showed us how we could ALLEGORIZE the Old Testament "letter" into the New Testament "Spirit."

"Allegory is language that says one thing and means either something MORE than what it says or something OTHER than what it says." --- Theologian R.A. Norris,

in his article on "Allegory" in THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO ORIGEN.

Allegory has been defined by Bishop Marsh, in accordance with its etymology, as "a representation of one thing which is intended to excite the representation of another thing."

So, when allegorizing the Old Testament, the "another thing" is always some aspect of Jesus and His coming kingdom. All such allegories find their rest in Christ. This is why I have coined the term "Christo-allegory" to describe the process of allegorizing Old Testament Scriptures into Christological meaning.

The very first usage by a Christian of the concept of allegory was not some New Age kook, or some modern liberal theologian (as many seem to inexplicably think).

It was the apostle Paul who first used and modeled the term in its Christian application. So, if we have a problem with Old Testament allegory, our problem is with Paul, Peter, and the early church fathers, not to mention Jesus. But let's start with Paul's explicit usage of the term "allegory."

"24 Now THIS (the Old Testament narrative of Sarah and Hagar) may be interpreted ALLEGORICALLY (Greek "allegoria"): these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

25 Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

26 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

27 For it is written, ‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.’

28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

29 But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

30 But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

31 So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.” - Galatians 4:24-31

We mustn’t miss the importance of what Paul did here. Nobody for a second thinks the Mosaic writer’s original intent or immediate context, when writing this narrative a thousand years earlier, meant it ever to be read as an allegory for the Old and New Covenants.

As Patristic Scholar David Bentley Hart recently said, “Really, when did Paul not allegorize the Old Testament?”

"As should be obvious, Paul frequently allegorizes Hebrew scripture; the 'spiritual reading' of ScriptureScripture typical of the Church Fathers of the early centuries was not their invention, nor just something borrowed from pagan culture, but was already a widely accepted hermeneutical practice among Jewish scholars. So it is not anachronistic to read Paul here as saying that the stories he is repeating are not accurate historical accounts of actual events, but allegorical tales composed for the edification of readers..... Again, one should not assume that Paul does not mean precisely what he says, and takes the tale to be essentially (not merely secondarily) allegorical. His interpretative habits are rarely literalist.” [The New Testament: A Translation (2017), David Bentley Hart, pg. 336, 376].

I am convinced that when Peter said that some of Paul’s writings were difficult to grasp, at least one thing to which he was referring was his heavy use of allegory in updating Old Testament imagery with the better light of the New Testament.

When Paul read the Old Testament:

-- EXTERNAL circumcision became "nothing,"

-- EXTERNAL temple descriptions became entirely symbolic,

-- EXTERNAL animal sacrifices became meaningless rituals,

-- EXTERNAL narratives of Israel's journey became allegories of Christ.

Paul used Scripture to go INTERNAL:

-- INTERNAL heart-circumcision now became "everything,"

-- INTERNAL temple dynamics now say WE are the living temples of God,

-- INTERNAL sacrifices of self-will are what WE offer to God's purging fire,

-- INTERNAL human processes are now explained by reinterpreting Israel's history as allegorical archetypes of our human condition today, here, and now.

When apostle Paul cited Old Testament Scriptures, he usually expanded them to either mean something MORE or something OTHER than what they literally said.

Paul displayed this dynamic when he rescued the concept of circumcision by transfiguring it FROM an empty and meaningless external Old Testament ritual TO the New Testament reality of the internal spiritual transformation of the heart.

"Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." 1 Cor. 7:19.

"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love." Gal. 5:6.

"But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." Rom. 2:29.

Below are other New Testament passages using this same allegorical dynamic.

Galatians 4:21-31 (The "allegorical" reading of the Old Testament here is both modeled and approved by Paul, as he completely reinterprets the meaning of the story of Abraham, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael to refer rather to the current relationship between Old and New Covenants).

1 Corinthians 10:1-11(Paul "allegorizes" the whole Exodus journey of Israel as a type of the Christian walk, reading it non-literally in other words).

2 Corinthians 3:6-18 (Paul here says we are to be "ministers of the New Covenant, not of the letter, for the LETTER KILLS, but of the Spirit, for the Spirit gives life," and that Moses, as a symbol of Old Testament understanding, "veiled" the true meaning of OT Scripture by reading it with blind literalism).

Hebrews 8:1-5 (The voluminous OT passages about the "tabernacle," "priesthood," and "sacrifices" are all "shadows of heavenly things" rather than literal realities on earth).

Hebrews 10:1 (Here, we see the law itself is to be read allegorically: "the law, having a shadow of good things to come, and NOT the very image of the things").

Colossians 2:17 (The OT festivals, holy days, and dietary laws are all symbolic prefigurements called "shadows" of "the body of Christ" to come, again not the literal thing itself but a prophetic allegory of the Kingdom of God).

Matthew 11:13 ("ALL the OT law and prophets prophesied until John the Baptist," the clear implication being that the OT is one big prophetic allegory of Christ to come).

Luke 11:27 ("ALL" the OT Scriptures, when properly read, speak ONLY of Christ).

Paul also transformed the Sabbath from a “letter of the law” weekly ritual to an ongoing lifestyle state of being. Heb. 4:1-11.

Paul (and Peter)both renovated Old Testament dietary laws by integrating faith and thanksgiving into the true spiritual diet. (Acts. 11:5-10; Rom. 14:1-23; 1 Tim. 4:3-4).

In 1 Cor. 14:21, Paul took an Old Testament passage which on its face had nothing to do with New Testament tongues (Is. 28:11-12), and transformed, enhanced, and enriched it to make it a prophetic passage for the spiritual gift of tongues.

In Acts 2, Peter did the same thing in taking Joel 2:28-29 and excavating, renovating, and elevating it to prophesy the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is beyond dispute that the Old Testament scholars of their day would have accused Paul and Peter (and the other New Testament writers) of butchering and misusing scriptures. They didn't see that the Old Testament scriptures needed to be transformed, enhanced, and enriched.

But, as much as Paul loved and modeled Old Testament allegory ("and really when did Paul not allegorize"—Patristic Scholar David Bentley Hart), it was Jesus who FIRST modeled the idea.

While Paul is readily seen as an allegorist, Jesus Himself is frequently overlooked in this area. In point of fact, Jesus frequently allegorized the Old Testament. Using key imagery from Old Testament passages which were ONLY seen as literal, He would then usurp their literal meaning into an allegorical application toward Himself. He referred to Himself ALLEGORICALLY as the Temple of God (John 2:19-22), the true manna from heaven (John 6:50), Jacob's supernatural ladder between

heaven and earth (John 1:51), the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-40), the great shepherd of Psalm 23 (John 10:11), etc.

God revealed Himself as the great "I Am" In Exodus 3 with Moses at the Burning Bush. Jesus refers to Himself as the "I Am" on at least eight separate occasions, thus personifying the Burning Bush allegory. In each of those eight occasions, the wording in the original Greek is the same. Jesus refers to Himself not simply as "I am" but literally as "I, I Am". The phrase could be legitimately translated as "I and I alone" or "I and no one else". The words He chose are emphatic.

The Emmaus Road experience, in fact, gives us express commission to Christo-allegorize Old Testament Scripture. "And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, He (Christ) INTERPRETED to them in ALL THE SCRIPTURES the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?.... And he said unto them , These are the words which I spake unto you , while I was yet with you , that all things must be fulfilled , which were written in the law of Moses , and in the prophets , and in the psalms , concerning me . Then opened He their understanding , that they might understand the scriptures...." Luke 24:26-27, 31-32, 44-45.

Now, we know that Jesus is LITERALLY nowhere explicitly to be found by name in the Old Testament. But, ALLEGORICALLY, He is everywhere to be found. Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to these two highly blessed disciples. And their hearts burned within them as they finally understood the true import of the Old Testament. And so can ours as we allow the Spirit to quicken the treasure trove of allegorical/Christological subtext of Scripture.

Part 6

Patristic Universalism

Chapter Seventy-Six

CAN WE REALLY ETERNALLY OUTLAST HIS LOVE?

Our theology gets bigger as our image of God gets bigger.

When I FIRST came to the Lord, I could not imagine His salvation was for all.

Mainly, this was because everywhere I looked I could see that so very many ignored Him, maligned Him, blamed Him, defied Him, and disobeyed Him. I just could see no way for them to ever find God's salvation in this life, much less the next. In my hubris, I thought I was part of a special remnant, a small band of the faithful who alone would enter heaven.

But then a funny thing happened to me.

I got to actually know and grow in the Spirit of Christ. I saw that it wasn't really at all about what I perceived or thought in my narrow and reactive thought. Rather, it was about WHO and WHAT God was at the core of His being. And that core was Jesus...

...a good Shepard who leaves the found "ninety-nine to go after the lost one,"

...a hero who bravely stands against bloodthirsty mobs seeking to stone the guilty,

...a worker of spontaneous and spectacular cures in impossible situations,

...a teacher who taught forgiveness and blessing toward all our enemies,

...the express essence of a God of light, lightness, and love.

So this is where I stand.

Sooner or later-- all.

Sooner is much better in every way.

But it's NEVER "over" until the "prodigal-embracing," "sin-curing," and "lost-chasing" good shepherd says it is. And I've never heard Him say it.

Who can eternally resist His grace--temporally maybe— even for an extended season perhaps— but forever?

My word, who has THAT strength of will? Can we really eternally outlast His indefatigable love?

God certainly is the irresistible force of goodness, but are we the eternally immovable object? I just don't see it. If, as Paul said, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God," then who are we to disagree?

NOW, I can't imagine His salvation is NOT for all.

I have grown to have more faith in God's ability, through Jesus, to woo and win us than in our ability to evade and reject His love.

We simply aren't that strong.

Sure, we can withstand His beckoning Spirit for a season, an epoch, even a lengthy age by all human standards, but resisting His indefatigable goodness forever and ever? Are we really that strong-willed?

Or maybe, just maybe, we need to get over ourselves and just admit that God is ultimately irresistible.

Jesus' "eternal yes" is infinitely stronger than humanity's "temporal no."

Sooner or later—ALL.

ALL will be wooed and won.

"Sooner" is better in every way.

But "later" is the cosmic safety net for every lost sheep.

Chapter Seventy-Seven

“olam” and "aionios”

The Hebrew word “olam” and the Greek word "aionios” are both sometimes translated as "everlasting" in Scripture (as in "everlasting punishment"), but these words do NOT always in fact mean "unending or everlasting in quantity of time."

Rather, “olam” and "aionios" both speak (according to Greek scholar William Barclay) to an "indeterminate age set by God alone.”

The words refer to a certain quality of being -- whether it be "aionios/olam life" or "aionios/olam remedial-punishment." Aionios is always qualified by what it is describing.

For instance, the word "great," when applied to a merciful sentence imposed by a kind-hearted judge, might refer to a small amount of time in jail. Conversely, "great," when applied to an atrocious crime, for which the judge throws the book at the defendant, might refer to a life sentence in jail.

Similarly, the duration and quality of aionios/olam when applied to the life of God is entirely different than when it is applied to the chastening or punishment of God.

“Great life" in God is certainly unending, since death will have been completely defeated, but the unending length is not the primary essence of that "Great life."

The limitless quality of being totally at one with the Lord is the key aspect of this "Great life." On the other hand, "Great punishment" by God will not be unending since He punishes to correct and rehabilitate, and He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Pet. 3:9.

Life in God is not everlasting because it is aionios/olam, but rather aionios/olam is everlasting because it refers to life in God.

Conversely, aionios/olam punishment is not temporary because aionios means temporary, but rather aionios is temporary in this context since God's chastening is curative and incapable of being eternally resisted.

Aionios/olam then, by themselves, mean an "indeterminate age," not an "unending age." Only the context of the passage provides guidance as to the actual quality and duration of the age.

Chapter Seventy-Eight

Jesus Emptied Hell.

Want proof Jesus emptied Hell so that He could indwell and infill all of us?

"But grace was given to all of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore, it says, 'When Jesus ascended on high, he led out a host of captives, and in 'leading captivity itself captive' he also gave gifts to men.'

In saying, 'Jesus ascended,' what does it mean but that Jesus had also descended into the lower regions of earth [i.e., Hell]? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might FILL ALL IN ALL." Ephesians 4:7-10

The gospel is not toothless, but it is fangless.

The gates of Hell are the fangs.

Jesus would never let those mean gates stand eternally.

In fact, He tore them off their hinges long ago.

Don't drink any cruel Kool-Aid, which suggests otherwise.

Jesus is better, braver, brighter, and more bountifully buoyant and breathtakingly beautiful than that.

Chapter Seventy-Nine

Hell Cannot Stand.

"And I say to you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." Matthew 16:18.

If this verse means anything, it assures us:

1. Hell is a conceptual force OPPOSED to His church, not a force working with it, a hostile force which seeks to "prevail" over us.

2. Hell is a conceptual enemy that won't prevail over the true church built upon the rock of Christ. The idea of it can't withstand the love and light of God.

3. That the church built on the Christ-rock will fulfill this cosmic promise by endorsing and enforcing Christus Victor, the epic narrative of Christ's harrowing of Hell by

ripping its gates OFF (literally and conceptually), caving its power IN, and getting its prisoners OUT.

Disturbingly, if the majority of the church is instead declaring Hell's gates are secure, impenetrable, and fully able to eternally withstand the ministry of Christ and His body, then...

maybe...

perhaps..

possibly...

...we need to go back and recapture the smash and verve of this verse.

Whatever Hell might have once been, it is no longer. Just as many Civil War prisons of oppression were later converted into hospitals of healing, so too a defanged Hell, after Christ invaded and retooled it, became a spiritual hospital and healing asylum.

Chapter Eighty

Love will conquer all.

Our beliefs about “last things” should be based on our knowledge of “first things.”

Theologian John A.T. Robinson brilliantly believed that a true understanding of "end things" comes not from "predictive foresight” about world events, but rather from "profound insight" into the first things of God's nature.

So, what are the “first things?”

Here is my version.

Love WILL find a way to bring us to union. Love’s omnipotent energy only and always rescues, restores, and reconciles.

Love WILL conquer all, not coercively by fear and force, but by gentle and patient persuasion.

Love is God's unchangeable WILL to all goodness, which can be rejected and ignored in the short run, but NOT in the long run.

Love is the eternal "elephant in the room" that will never leave us or evict us.

GOD is love!

GOD is light!

"In the end, GOD!"

Chapter Eighty-One

Hell is eternally empty.

The only thing eternal about Hell is that it's eternally empty.

Easy to prove.

"[A]nd DEATH and HELL delivered up the dead which were in them..." Revelation 20:13

Hmmm... death emptied

Hmmm... hell emptied

"And death and Hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." Revelation 20:14

Hmmm... the eternal death of death.

Hmmm... hell eternally ripped, gutted, and now perpetually devoid of any inhabitants.

You know what the vacuous voids known as “death and hell” really are?

After Hell is forever emptied in Revelation 20:14, "death and Hell" are then thrown into the Lake of Fire. There, all the "false identities" which are NOT written in the Book of Life, and which have since been burned off of us, NOW become victory trophies kept in the cosmic museum of the Lake of Fire eternally blazing and proclaiming the salvation of “each,” “all,” and “every.”

Chapter Eighty-Two

Why postmortem punishment can't be eternal.

Here is the simplest argument as to why postmortem punishment can't be eternal.

This dynamic refutes the proposition that the anguishing torments of Hell are "irrevocable and eternal in duration."

Here it is.

Most Christians would agree that Jesus absorbed" the toxic "sin poisons" produced by all our sins sown across all time and space. Simply put, Jesus voluntarily "reaped" and bore the full harvest of the sins "sown" by the world.

So, IF Jesus DID suffer the immediate “blast radius” harvest for all our sins, both individually and corporately, then what can we determine about the nature and duration of that harvest?

Well, what leaps off the page is that Jesus' suffering WAS of infinite intensity but NOT of infinite duration. If it were, Jesus would STILL be suffering in eternal conscious torment in Hell today, yesterday, and FOREVER.

But, Jesus most assuredly is not currently in Hell. Rather, He is seated now at the right hand of the Father, and also living within us now as the hope of glory.

The point? Whatever consequences our individual and corporate sowing of unrepentant evil may causatively harvest, we know that infinite duration of torment CANNOT be among them. For if it were, Jesus would be suffering in Hell throughout all the ages to come. But, since He is not, then the endless duration of torments simply CAN'T be part of the substitutionary suffering Jesus endured.

Certainly, Jesus' suffering WAS vertically infinite (i.e., in limitless intensity), but it WASN'T horizontally infinite (i.e., in limitless duration), or Jesus would be irrevocably in Hell this very moment-- today, now, and forever.

And He isn’t. He is at the right hand of the Father.

Easy, eternally peasy.

Chapter Eighty-Three

Post-mortem purgative fire.

"Now, now, Richard the post-mortem purgative fire which you always refer to from 1 Corinthians 3 is NOT talking about saving non-Christian unbelievers, but ONLY saving Christian believers."

Oh really?

Let's take a look.

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For no other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if

any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; EVERY MAN'S WORK shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be REVEALED BY FIRE; and THE FIRE SHALL TRY EVERY MAN'S WORK, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS, BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE." 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

The above Corinthians passage on postmortem salvation emphatically says “every man” and “any man” (“hekastos” and “ei tis”). Where on earth do brimstoners get the idea 1 Corinthians 3 is ONLY talking about believers who are already “saved” in this life, and thus would not NEED to be “saved” yet again in the next life (as the passage says)?

Thus, the context of 1 Corinthians 3 is not limited to just believers but to "any man" and to "every man.” Moreover, it refers to the judgment of "Every man's work" (verse 13). The Revelation passage about the Lake of Fire in chapters 20-21 ALSO refers to the judgment of every man's works: "the dead were judged... according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

So, Paul and John were both describing the same event, the judgment of every man's works, but from their slightly different perspectives. Now, note what Paul says ultimately happens on the other side of every man's

work being judged: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE."

So, what exactly do we know about the Lake of Fire? I have heard theologians of all ilks agree to never build a firm dogma on just one passage in Scripture, particularly if that passage is in the smack dab middle of Jewish apocalyptic section of the Bible like the book of Revelation. The reason is that this form of literature, unlike the epistles and the Gospel, are full of heavily symbolic language and feverish activity. They are more poetic and visionary than they are doctrinal. There is only extended passage that ever even talks about the Lake of Fire, and that is in Revelation 19-21.

All we know about it is:

-the devil is cast into along with the beast and the false prophet(19:20)

-those that worship the image of the beast(19:20)

-that the devil (a false identity of Lucifer?) is tormented forever (20:10)

-death and an emptied Hell are cast into it (20:14)

-and whosever's not found written in the book of life is cast into it(20:15)

-and the fearful, unbelieving, etc. shall have their PART in it(20:8)

Curiously, no particular individual is named as being cast into it. Symbolic figures are cast into it, beasts and false prophets and the devil. Nobody by proper name is mentioned. Not Herod, not Pharaoh, not Hitler, not Nero. Some "part" of our sinful being is cast into it, but does other Scripture help us better understand what that is exactly? I say yes. Scripture helps interpret Scripture.

The reasons I believe 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Revelation 20:12-15 are referring to the same event is because of several factors.

-both are referring to a postmortem experience

-both refer to themselves as "the judgment of men's works"

-both explicitly refer to "every man" man being so judged

-both use the imagery of "fire"

-both refer to some sort of dividing which includes "suffering and loss"

The man himself shall be saved, yet he shall SUFFER LOSS, YET SO AS BY FIRE. But, WHAT EXACTLY is it that is "BURNED" off and in the process causes the man to "SUFFER" and experience "LOSS?" The answer

is clear: OUR CARNALITY IS BURNED OFF AND AWAY FROM US!

In this context, the "wood, hay and stubble" of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 represents the various types of forged identities, false personages, plasticized personalities, inauthentic beings, and mendacious masks which we have co-created with Satan and worn as the primary motivating forces behind our actions and works. Instead of performing "righteous works" that will endure, works of "gold, silver, and precious stones" (v. 12), works done under the Holy Spirit's leading and anointing (Romans 8:14), we have masked the real motives for our works with that which is from below and not above---motives which are false, demonic, and self-centered.

Each and every wood-mask, hay-mask and stubble-mask a man has wrongly allowed to be grafted onto his soul will have to be burned. The result is that he will experience the "wrenching and painful loss" of having huge parts of who he "thought" he really was over the course of his entire life completely burned away with white hot fire.

Like the most intense form of chemotherapy we know in the physical, yet multiplied a thousand times in painful intensity in the spiritual, every mask will be irradiated and destroyed with the fire of God. The man suffers a searing "identity crisis" which, though in the long term will bring great positive transformation, is in the short term painful beyond words. The length of time for the

burning process may vary. "Wood" takes longer to burn than "hay" or "stubble," so wood-masks are the most dangerous.

These false identities caused the man during his time on earth to operate outside his authentic self, and instead assume the sin-identity of a lust-mask, or a pride-mask, or a legalism-mask. The man may have grafted on a "religious" mask and thereafter thought he was serving God, and that all his good works were in the service of the Lord, when in truth he was only serving his own self-righteousness (Matthew 7:22-23). Or, the man may have been serving his own fleshly desires while wearing a mask of "carnality." Finally, the man could just be wearing "the pride of life" mask which prevented him from humbly submitting to the Lordship of the Spirit by operating in self-will.

Regardless, these masks "warp" the core motive of every man and cause them to be someone they are not, someone they were never created or called to be by God. To the extent these masks corrupt the purity of our identities in Christ, they MUST go.

So, how are they removed? In this lifetime, by sanctification, repentance and the self-judgment that comes through prayer and communion. Paul said that if we judge ourselves NOW by removing every inner sin-mask, we will not be judged later. But, IF these sin-masks are still grafted onto our souls at the time

of death, which means we never dealt with them fully during our lifetime, then the Lord deals with them at the judgment of every man's works, "yet so as by fire."

The Lord uses, what the church Fathers Clement and Origen called God's "WISE FIRE" to burn off and away all the false masks we have lived out of, the Satanic strongholds which have blinded, twisted and deformed us. The masks are the result of the MISUSE of our freedom combined with the Devil's temptations and lies.

Seen from this angle, judgment is a good thing, not a fearful thing. The Greek word for "judge" means "to separate or put asunder." God "separates" our true self from all our false selves. He "tears asunder" the masks from our true identity. And then what becomes of all our masked identities? THEY ARE CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE, NEVER AGAIN TO BE PUT ON BY US OR ANYBODY ELSE!

Chapter Eighty-Four

Saul- A false identity.

Saul's "name" (nature) was NOT written in "the book of life." But, wonderfully, Paul's "name" WAS written in the book of life.

Same person.

Different name.

Different nature.

In Hebraic thought, the concept of "name" symbolizes "nature." Likewise, all our false names/natures are NOT written in the book of life, while all our authentic God-crafted names/natures ARE written in the book of life.

I see God's nature as only and always curative because I see Jesus that way. Postmortem cures are very painful and anguish-producing because of our stubborn vice-like grip on our delusions, but there is life on the other side.

What gets excluded from the book of life get's cast into the lake of fire. These elements are not our whole beings, but rather are toxic aspects of our non-being--- false identities, sin masks which have deformed, debilitated, and impoverished us from manifesting our original created purpose. These forged identity masks have grafted themselves, with our consent, onto our souls and must be carefully irradiated and excised by the curative and corrective knife of divine love.

Again, Saul was a false identity that needed to be excised out and away from the real identity of Paul. Satan is a sin mask of non-being or false-being, a plasticized persona which will ultimately be cast into the lake fire. But Lucifer (if we accept his ontology) the angel will be restored.

New Testament passages that describe this ultimate postmortem restoration of stolen identity are quoted below.

“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one ALL THINGS in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him." (Eph. 1:9-10). Sounds like angels are included here.

“He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject ALL things to Himself" (Phil. 3:21).

“For as in Adam ALL die, even so in Christ shall ALL BE MADE ALIVE. But EVERY man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put ALL enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put ALL things under his feet. But when he saith, ALL things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put ALL things under him. And when ALL things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put ALL things under him, that GOD MAY BE 'ALL IN ALL.' Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" 1 Corinthians 15:22-29. ("Rulers, authorities and powers " are mentioned here, which usually refer to angelic authorities.)

“I heard EVERY creature IN heaven, ON earth, UNDER the earth, ON the sea, and EVERYTHING in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

(Rev. 5:13). (Angels here included in the restoration-- no creaturely exception.)

“Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make ALL things new'" --- God will dwell with men and he will wipe every tear from their eyes, death, mourning, crying, pain and the old order of things will pass and everything and everybody will be made new (Rev. 21:5, 3-4).

Let's consider two New Testament passages which imply, as does "the book of life" passage, that some names/natures are included and some excluded. In toto, these passages reveal that God's postmortem fire somehow severs and sunders our true identities from our false identities.

“EVERY MAN'S work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be BURNED, he shall SUFFER LOSS: but HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; yet so AS BY FIRE." 1 Cor. 3:13-15.

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In FLAMING FIRE taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting

destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power...." 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

Is this passage, as well as such other passage as Hebrews 10, is the object of the Lord's vengeance it talking about "evil people" or is it talking about "evil qualities?" The word translated as "who" in verse 9 can either mean "whatever" or "whoever."

Thus, we need to refer to other Pauline passages regarding the postmortem fire, such as 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 (quoted in full above) to clarify Paul's thinking in this area. In this passage, the man "suffers loss" but "he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." Thus, this passage suggests that what gets punished is a "whatever" and not a "whoever." God punishes with eternal destructions evil notions, not evil nations. Remember, the ancient writers, especially Paul, used personification to describe both virtue and evil all the time.

In other words, when ancient writers used a "who," they often meant a "what."

The Bible authors pervasively used a literary technique called "personification." The ancient writers personified most everything. Personification is the representation of an object, concept, trait, or quality AS IF it were a person. Again, wicked nations become wicked notions. External giants become internal strongholds of fear. Wisdom and foolishness, in the Book of Proverbs, are both personified as women lifting up their voices in the street. Consider

Paul's personification of sin ruling as a king in his body, and the "old man" and "new man" as personifications of two warring persons in the new creature after baptism.

So, for Paul to say that the personification of all the dark dynamics within us will be destroyed (i.e. NOT written in the book of life) is ultimately a wonderful thing, all our false sin-identities cast into the lake of fire nevermore to trouble us again.

Chapter Eighty-Five

Sin natures, or whole human beings?

"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." - Revelation 21:8

Hmmm. Something has always struck me as odd about this passage. It is so cold, dismissive, and impersonal. Nobody's personal or proper name is ever mentioned. Could it be that "sin-natures" and "sin-strongholds" are being referred to here rather than actual and whole human beings? Could God's future judgments be, as the church father Clement described, "wise fire" which will burn "off and away" any and all "sin-masks" which

have toxically grafted themselves onto our soul? Could it simply be that the Great Physician performs psychic postmortem surgery to heal, restore, and repair us?

Let's go back to the Revelation 21 passage.

"All liars" are cast into the Lake of Fire-- which one of us would not fit that bill at various times in our lives? Who among us has not had a sexually immoral thought? Who among us has not committed idolatry toward something-- money, prestige, false gods, or other people? Who among us has not been faithless for extended periods of our lives? Considering the Sermon on the Mount, in which Jesus tells us having hate in our heart toward others is a form a murder, and that lust in our heart a form of adultery, then who among us would NOT be a prime candidate for a Lake of Fire dunking.

And, is that all the God of love sees us as? As adulterers, idolaters, faithless failures, inveterate liars, all pond scum to burn eternally on the Lake of Fire? Surely not.

Here is the key to balancing this highly figurative passage with all the other passages which seem to point at a better and far less judgmental end for all humanity. The Bible authors pervasively used a literary technique called "personification." The ancient writers personified most everything. Personification is the representation of an object, concept, trait or quality AS IF it were a person.

Wicked nations become wicked notions. External giants become internal strongholds of fear. Jezebel and Balaam become personifications of particular toxic spiritual dynamics working within the churches in Revelation. Isaac and Ishmael, along with Sarah and Hagar become personifications of the Old and New Covenants in Galatians 4. Wisdom and foolishness, in the Book of Proverbs, are personalized as women lifting up their competing voices in the street.

Consider Paul's personification in Romans 7 of sin and evil "dwelling" as a king in his body, and the "old man" and "new man" as personifications of two warring persons in the new creature after baptism. When Paul says our old man (i.e. our sin-nature) is crucified with Christ, is he talking about our whole being, or only a part of it? Is Paul referring to a false identity, a plasticized persona, a forged identity, or to our entire being? The more this sinks in, the more it resonates that John's "Lake of Fire" is referring to a place where our sin-strongholds are cast, NOT our core and essential selves.

So, keeping this personification technique in mind, Noah's experience with ark and flood now personifies New Testament baptism. See 1 Peter 3:21-22. Noah's flood is now spiritually understood as an external symbol, or a personified "figure" as Peter called it, of an internal event. God, by His Holy Spirit, floods our inner being with cleansing and purging energies, a flood of baptismal fire which burns and washes away evil notions, evil

impulses, evil stronalgholds, evil images, evil desires, etc. Conversely, what gets saved is our core soul, that "righteous Noah" part of us which desires God. Jesus is the protective ark of our salvation which carries us through this sanctifying flood and lands us on dry land to begin our spiritual lives anew in a re-created inner world.

"Every man, within himself has Moses and the Israelites, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the Patriarchs and the kingdom of heaven and hell. Thus, the events described in the Bible, and looked upon by the pious as being things of a past history, are actually descriptions of internal processes taking place in the constitution of man himself". Jacob Boehme 1575-1624

God may flood away INTERNAL notions, but He would never flood away EXTERNAL nations. Not nations who have countless infants, toddlers, and children. It's not in God's nature to kill people who, "who don't know what they are doing." Jesus prayed for their forgiveness, not for their destruction. God may seek to slay unloving notions, but never unloving nations.

Let me offer an example. Saul's "name" (the concept of "name" Hebraically symbolizes "nature") was not written in "the book of life." But, praise God, Paul's name was written in the book of life. Likewise, all our false names/natures are NOT written in the book of life, while all our authentic God-crafted names/natures ARE written in the book of life.

I see God's nature as only and always curative because I see Jesus that way. Postmortem cures are very painful and anguish producing, even Hellish, but there is life on the other side. What gets cast into the lake of fire are not our whole beings, but rather all toxic aspects of our non-being--- false identities, sin masks which have deformed, debilitated, and impoverished us from manifesting our original created purpose. These forged identity masks have grafted themselves, with our consent, onto our souls and must be carefully irradiated and excised by the curative and corrective knife of divine love. Saul was a false identity that needed to be excised out and away from the real identity of Paul. Satan is a sin mask of non-being or false-being, a persona which will be cast into the fire. But Lucifer (if we accept his ontology) the angel will be restored.

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enables Him to subject ALL things to Himself" (Phil. 3:21).

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"For as in Adam ALL die, even so in Christ shall ALL BE MADE ALIVE. But EVERY man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put ALL enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put ALL things under his feet. But when he saith, ALL things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put ALL things under him. And when ALL things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put ALL things under him, that GOD MAY BE 'ALL IN ALL.' Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?" 1 Corinthians 15:22-29.

"I heard EVERY creature IN heaven, ON earth, UNDER the earth, ON the sea, and EVERYTHING in them say: Blessing and honor and glory and dominion to the One seated on the throne and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13). (No creaturely exception.)

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make ALL things new'" --- God will dwell with men and he will wipe every tear from their eyes, death, mourning, crying, pain and the old order of things will pass and everything and everybody will be made new (Rev. 21:5, 3-4).

Now, let's consider how this dynamic helps us to reinterpret passages such as the one below.

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In FLAMING FIRE taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power...." 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9.

Is this last Thessalonians passage, is the object of the Lord's vengeance talking about "evil people" or is it talking about "evil qualities?" The word translated as "who" in verse 9 can either mean "whatever" or "whoever."

Thus, we need to again refer to other Pauline passages regarding the postmortem fire, such as 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 (quoted in full above) to clarify Paul's thinking in this area. In this passage, the man "suffers loss" but "he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." Thus, this passage suggests that what gets punished is a "whatever" and not a "whoever." God punishes with eternal destructions of evil notions, not evil nations. Remember, the ancient writers, especially Paul, used personification to describe both virtue and evil all the time.

Again, when ancient writers used a "who," they often meant a "what."

So, for Paul or John to say that the personification of all the dark dynamics within us will be destroyed is ultimately a wonderful thing, even though it appears as a fearful thing on THIS side of the cure.

The only thing eternal about Hell is that it's eternally empty.

Easy to prove.

"And DEATH and HELL delivered up the dead which were in them..." Revelation 20:13

Hmmm... death emptied

Hmmm... hell emptied

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” Revelation 20:14

Hmmm... the eternal death of death.

Hmmm... hell eternally ripped, gutted, and now perpetually devoid of any inhabitants.

You know what the vacuous voids known as “death and hell” really are?

After Hell is forever emptied in Revelation 20:14, "death and Hell" are then thrown into the Lake of Fire. There, all the "false identities" which are NOT written in the Book of Life, and which have since been burned off of us, now become victory trophies kept in the cosmic museum of the Lake of Fire eternally blazing and proclaiming the salvation of “each,” “all,” and “every.”

Jesus wins. Each. Every. All.

Chapter Eighty-Six

The Lord uses "wise fire."

Here is the passage that “infernalists” and “brimstoners” don’t want you to see. And if you do, then they will boldly claim it only applies to believers and not to all humanity.

“For no other foundation can man lay except that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if ANY MAN build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; EVERY MAN'S WORK shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be REVEALED BY FIRE; and THE FIRE SHALL TRY EVERY MAN'S WORK, of what sort it is. If ANY MAN’S work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS, BUT HE

HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE." 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

This Corinthians passage on postmortem salvation emphatically says “every man” and “any man” (“hekastos” and “ei tis”). So, where on earth do brimstoners get the idea that 1 Corinthians 3 is only talking about believers who are ALREADY “saved” in this life, and thus would not NEED to be “saved” YET AGAIN in the next life (as the passage says).

Infernalists seem to be unable (or unwilling) to process the words “every” and “all” throughout the New Testament when it is applied toward Jesus being the savior of the world to such an extent that, at the end of all the ages, “EVERY creature IN heaven and ON earth and UNDER the earth and IN the sea, and ALL that is in them [will be heard] saying, ‘To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!’" Revelation 5:13.

Paul was quite articulate and easily capable of clarifying in no uncertain terms that the postmortem “judgement fire” described in 1 Corinthians 3 applied to “only believers,” or to “only the brethren,” or to “only the members of the church.” He could simply have inserted the word “believers” in the passage after ”every”... but he didn’t.

Christ IS the foundation of every human who comes into the world, whether they become a believer or remain an unbeliever.

Scriptures teach that ALL humans are made in the image of God and thus ALL humans are created to be temples of the Holy Spirit. Some of these temples are not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, some are, while others are in the process of being filled, either in this age or this age or the age to come. But Christ is the true light who lights EVERY human who comes into the world, and that in Him we ALL move and live and have our being.

Below are passages for the point that Christ is the foundation of "each" and "every" human who comes into the world.

Jesus was "the true Light, which lights EVERY man that comes into the world." John 1:9. [not just believers as infernalists claim].

"ALL things were made through Him [Christ], and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men." John 1:3-4.

"In Him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'" Acts 17:28 [Paul is referring here to even Pagans being God's offspring and living in Him].

"One God and FATHER OF ALL, who is over all and THROUGH ALL and IN ALL." Ephesians 4:6.

16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities–all things were created through him and for him.

17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16–17

Thus, the context of 1 Corinthians 3 is not limited to just believers but to "any man" and to "every man."

Again, infernalists and brimstoners seem to be unable (or unwilling) to process the words “every” and “all” throughout the New Testament when it is applied to Jesus being the savior of the world. Let’s exegete this passage without brimstoned presumptions.

“For no other foundation can man lay except that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if ANY MAN build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; EVERY MAN'S WORK shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be REVEALED BY FIRE; and THE FIRE SHALL TRY EVERY MAN'S WORK, of what sort it is. If ANY MAN’S work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS, BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE." 1 Corinthians 3:11–15.

This passage above refers to the judgment of "Every man's work" (verse 13). The Revelation passage about the Lake of Fire in chapters 20-21 ALSO refers to the judgment of every man's works: "the dead were judged... according to their works" (Revelation 20:12). So, Paul and John were both describing the same event, the judgment of every man's works, but from their slightly different perspectives. Now, note what Paul says ultimately happens on the other side of every man's work being judged: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE."

So, what exactly do we know about the Lake of Fire? I have heard theologians of all ilks agree to never build a firm dogma on just one passage in Scripture, particularly if that passage is smack dab in the middle of the Jewish apocalyptic section of the Bible, like the book of Revelation. The reason is that this form of literature, unlike the epistles and the Gospel, is full of heavily symbolic language and feverish activity. They are more poetic and visionary than they are doctrinal. There is only one extended passage that ever even talks about the Lake of Fire, and that is in Revelation 19-21.

All we know about it is:

-the Devil is cast into it along with the beast, the false prophet, and those that worship the image of the beast(19:20)

-that the Devil (a false identity of Lucifer?) is tormented forever (20:10)

-death and an emptied Hell are cast into it (20:14)

-that whosever's name is not found written in the book of life is cast into it(20:15), along with the fearful, unbelieving, etc., and that they all shall have their PART in it(20:8)

Curiously, no particular individual is named as being cast into it. Symbolic figures are cast into it, beasts and false prophets and the Devil. Nobody by proper name is mentioned. Not Herod, not Pharaoh, not Hitler, not Nero. Some "part" of our sinful being is cast into it, but does other Scripture help us better understand what that is exactly? I say yes. Scripture helps interpret Scripture.

The Bible authors pervasively used a literary technique called "personification." The ancient writers personified most everything. Personification is the representation of an object, concept, trait, or quality AS IF it were a person. Again, wicked nations become wicked notions. External giants become internal strongholds of fear. Wisdom and foolishness, in the Book of Proverbs, are both personified as women lifting up their voices in the street. Consider Paul's personification of sin ruling as a king in his body,

and the "old man" and "new man" as personifications of two warring persons in the new creature after baptism.

So, for Paul to say that the personification of all the dark dynamics within us will be destroyed is ultimately a wonderful thing, even though it appears as a fearful thing on THIS side of the cure. God is all about name/nature changes? We are all carnal “Sauls” becoming spiritual “Pauls.

The reasons I believe 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and Revelation 20:12-15 are referring to the same event are based on several factors:

-both are referring to a postmortem experience

-both refer to themselves as "the judgment of men's works"

-both explicitly refer to "every man" being so judged

-both use the imagery of "fire"

-both refer to some sort of dividing which includes "suffering and loss.”

The man himself shall be saved, yet he shall SUFFER LOSS, YET SO AS BY FIRE. But, WHAT EXACTLY is it that is "BURNED" off and in the process causes the man to "SUFFER" and experience "LOSS?" The answer is clear: THE MASKS ARE BURNED OFF AND AWAY FROM US! In this context, the "wood, hay and

stubble" of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 represents the various types of false masks we have co-created with Satan and worn as the primary motivating forces behind our actions and works. Instead of performing "righteous works" that will endure, works of "gold, silver, and precious stones" (v. 12), works done under the Holy Spirit's leading and anointing (Romans 8:14), we have masked the real motives for our works with that which is from below and not above--- motives which are false, demonic, and self-centered.

Each and every wood-mask, hay-mask, and stubble-mask a man has wrongly allowed to be grafted onto his soul will have to be burned. The result is that he will experience the "wrenching and painful loss" of having huge parts of who he "thought" he really was over the course of his entire life, completely burned away with white hot fire.

Like the most intense form of chemotherapy we know in the physical, yet multiplied a thousand times in painful intensity in the spiritual, every mask will be irradiated and destroyed with the fire of God. The man suffers a searing "identity crisis" which, though in the long term will bring great positive transformation, is in the short term painful beyond words. The length of time for the burning process may vary. "Wood" takes longer to burn than "hay" or "stubble," so wood masks are the most dangerous.

These false identities caused the man during his time on earth to operate outside his authentic self, and instead assume the sin-identity of a lust-mask, or a pride-mask, or a legalism-mask. The man may have grafted on a "religious" mask and thereafter thought he was serving God, and that all his good works were in the service of the Lord, when in truth he was only serving his own self-righteousness (Matthew 7:22-23). Or, the man may have been serving his own fleshly desires while wearing a mask of "carnality." Finally, the man could just be wearing "the pride of life" mask, which prevented him from humbly submitting to the Lordship of the Spirit by operating in self-will.

Regardless, these masks "warp" the core motive of every man and cause them to be someone they are not, someone they were never created or called to be by God. To the extent these masks corrupt the purity of our identities in Christ, they MUST go.

So, how are they removed? In this lifetime, by sanctification, repentance, and the self-judgment that comes through prayer and communion. Paul said that if we judge ourselves NOW by removing every inner sin-mask, we will not be judged later. But, IF these sin-masks are still grafted onto our souls at the time of death, which means we never dealt with them fully during our lifetime, then the Lord deals with them at the judgment of every man's works, "yet so as by fire."

The Lord uses what the church Fathers Clement and Origen called God's "WISE FIRE" to burn off and away all the false masks we have lived out of, the Satanic strongholds which have blinded, twisted, and deformed us. The masks are the result of the MISUSE of our freedom, combined with the Devil's temptations and lies.

Seen from this angle, judgment is a good thing, not a fearful thing. The Greek word for "judge" means "to separate or put asunder." God "separates" our true self from all our false selves. He "tears asunder" the masks from our true identity. And then what becomes of all our masked identities? THEY ARE CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE, NEVER AGAIN TO BE PUT ON BY US OR ANYBODY ELSE!

Chapter Eighty-Seven

Jesus has eternally defeated Hell.

Let's never intentionally or unintentionally boast in Hell's victory. There is NO such thing.

Jesus has ALREADY eternally DEFEATED both death and Hell.

Let's think about that.

"Defeat" is a verb which refers to action successfully taken AGAINST enemy entities and enemy energies, NOT against faithful allies or loyal associates.

Jesus defeated His twin enemies of "death and Hell," not His twin allies of "light and life."

Here is the proof of victory. Death NOW has no sting and Hell has no bite.

IF we believe this, then why on earth would we EVER declare Hell's victory by consigning with our theological thoughts or spoken words that anybody would or could go and remain there forever?

Nope.

Game over.

Jesus already won, is now winning, and eternally wins.

His victory canvases all creation.

According to Christian theology, Jesus defeated death and Hell in several ways:

1) Death

The New Testament says that Jesus' death opened the doors to eternal life for those who were estranged from God. Hebrews 2:14-15 says that Jesus overcame death by sharing flesh and blood, destroying the power of death, and freeing those held captive by the fear of death.

2) Hell

The early church believed that Jesus descended into Hell after his death to rescue the souls of the righteous, such as Adam after his death to rescue the souls of the righteous, such as Adam and Eve. This period of time is known as

the Harrowing of Hell, which is described in the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed. The story is also alluded to in the New Testament in 1 Peter 4:6.

3) Enemies at the Gate

Hell is an enemy energy and/or an enemy entity OPPOSED to the Bride of Christ. "And I say also unto you, That you are Peter, and upon this rock (of revelation) I will build MY CHURCH; and the gates of hell shall not prevail AGAINST it." Matthew 16:18.

4) Keys

In the Bible, Jesus said to John on Patmos, "I have the keys of Hell and of Death" (Rev. 1:18).

Chapter Eighty-Eight

What's most like a loving father's heart?

Which statement below made by God to a prodigal soul upon physical death sounds the most like a loving father's heart?

Eternal Conscious Torment: "Because you have rejected me, I'm going have to torture your cancerous soul (or allow you to be tortured) forever-- and ever, with no respite, reprieve, or pardon. You should have believed me."

Annihilationism: "I'm going to put you out of your misery by incinerating you into nothingness. After all, they shoot horses to put them out their misery don't they?"

Apocatastasis: "It's time to go on a spiritual walkabout my beloved. It will be challenging. It will cause you much anguish. You may even grow in hate toward me and others until it starts to get better. Even though I know you think I'm lying right now, it will get better and you will be healed. I promise. And, when it does, the light will breakthrough and you will see all things brand new. Let's go."

Chapter Eighty-Nine

The difference between humanity's view of Hell and Jesus' view of Hell.

Want to know the difference between humanity's view of Hell and Jesus' view of Hell?

We humans so easily believe God WILL in fact abandon many, if not most, of our souls to Hell. We so readily see God "throwing away the punitive key," if not for ourselves, then for our enemies we so despise.

We seem so predisposed to quickly buy into a Hell of inescapable and eternal conscious torment for people who disbelieve or displease God over their brief lifespans lasting only a few earthly years.

Jesus, by contrast, at his very worst moment and at His very worst place, when everything around Him seemed empty and eternally hopeless, nonetheless clung to one game-changing epiphany.

With the cumulative weight of all our sins, fears, hates, and delusional states coursing through His being, He summoned up His energies and declared to all the fallen powers seeking His destruction and surrender, "Father, you will NOT abandon my soul to Hell." Acts 2:23-32.

Jesus knew something we largely don't. He understood His Father's love would NOT abandon Him-- EVER abandon-- His soul to eternal suffering and torment EVEN if He bore the totality of all our sins on his cosmic shoulders.

Hell's gates became forever unhinged on that day when Jesus declared His Father's rescuing love.

The gates of Hell did not (and will not) prevail against a Son who knew His Father's love. Nor should the gates of Hell prevail against us as His church bride. The Father loves us far too much to let us suffer eternally for the sins of our briefest of earth lives.

Jesus "descended" into Hell so that He could then "ascend," thereby "leading captivity captive.... that He might fill all things." Ephesians 4:8-9.

Chapter Ninety

Internalize and personalize.

Here is one key to understanding the Bible.

Internalize, internalize, internalize.

Personalize, personalize, personalize.

Or let me put it another way: INTERNALIZE and PERSONALIZE!

For us, the Bible must not be read "by the external letter," but rather "by the internal Spirit."

The Kingdom of God is within you.

This Kingdom doesn't come with outer observation but with inner penetration.

Scripture penetrates our inner Egypt and leads us to our inner Promised Land.

The enemy Philistines likewise are not flesh and blood to us.

They are wayward impulses and ideas trying to corrupt our lives from the inside out.

Goliath is an internal enemy you have let roam the streets of your heart far too long--- a carnal mindset, a fear, an insecurity, an intimidating dread which has paralyzed you.

Goliath is not an external giant as far as it concerns you.

The Goliath the most relevant to you is YOUR Goliath.

Nor is the shepherd David merely a Jew who lived thousands of years ago.

David is the Spirit of Christ living in you NOW!

David is a pre-figure of Jesus smashing the rock of His faith into the skull (mindset) of YOUR oncoming Goliath.

David is a pre-figure of Jesus, beheading Goliath's toxic thoughts and freeing you from all their oppressions by putting His mind into yours.

For every enemy impulse attacking you inwardly, there is a heroic Christological impulse ready to charge onto your

inner battlefield and defeat, defang, and destroy every Satanic suggestion seeking to form an enemy stronghold within you.

Samson's jawbone, David's slingshot, Moses' staff, and the ark of the covenant are allegorical allies arming us with inner inspiration to fight the good fight of faith.

Our weapons are not CARNAL and EXTERNAL, but are INTERNAL and PERSONAL, and are mighty through God to the tearing down of any and all mental strongholds of errant thought or vain imaginations which rise up against the knowledge of the Spirit, Jesus, and Abba.

Part 7

Digging Deeper

Chapter Ninety-One

FIVE TYPES OF DUALITY

Duality is as simple as "This and That." Duality always divides. Sometimes it divides into the violent opposition of This VERSUS That. Sometimes it divides our life into an endless array of self-willed choosing of This OR That. Sometimes it divides into work-based living where all that we desire must be earned or manipulated through our own effort of This FOR That. Still other times, Duality divides our thinking into continual judgments as we arrogantly assign blame or credit for all events before us - - This FROM That. Lastly, Duality can divide by blending together two opposites into a false yin\yang unity that is not of God - - This AND That. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is really the Tree of This\That Mindsets.

Duality #1: This versus That

The first type of Duality we will look at is This versus That. This is radical dualism, which sets up two poles of existence with no room for compromise between them. This Duality is what starts wars, hate, strife, competition, racism, fundamentalism, terrorism, and aggression. Force is the prominent dynamic here. This mindset sees all life as battle. There is only winning and losing, fighting and overcoming, attacking and surrendering.

The problem with this mindset is not just "what" it thinks but "how" it thinks. There is no rest, unity, or abiding joy because, like the cold-blooded shark, we must continually swim or die in the waters of force and conflict. Everyone who is not on my side is an enemy to be subdued, converted, or conquered. Other men are dehumanized into pawns with whom I must either compete or challenge. Us versus them. This is how Hitler recruited young men. He would have them turn in a family member for sedition. This act cemented the youth's allegiance to Hitler's "us" versus the "them" of the rest of the world. It is no different for any recruiting sect, whether it's religious, military, or social. They all seek to foster allegiance to some This versus That.

The tragedy of this mindset is that it uses man-made distinctions to keep men's teeth sharpened towards one another. Our default setting towards one another is suspicion, resentment, and aloofness. This mindset lives in the valley of peril-- usually either threatening or feeling threatened.

Under this form of Duality, it's always an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. It's winning at all costs. It's attacking at all provocation. It's the alpha male. The caveman. The mercenary. The business shark. The competitive athlete whose greatest joy is defeating opponents. It is Napoleon, Alexander the Great, and Machiavelli.

But, aren't we to oppose evil? Isn't winning better than losing? Aren't we to use our best effort to prevail in all things? We are certainly to oppose evil, but not dualistically (Matt. 5:38-48). We are called to be more than dualistic winners - - much more (Rom. 8:37). We are not to use our best effort to dualistically conquer the world, but rather we are to strive to enter into the Sabbath rest of God where He has already conquered the world with the love and life of Christ (Heb. 4:1-11).

The Duality of This versus That says if our eye or tooth is struck, then we must strike back at the eye or tooth of the attacker. Force for force. Blow for blow. But Jesus said, "resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Matt. 5:39. What a Duality-breaker! Good overcomes evil not by opposing it on its own terms of force, violence, and competition. Rather, good overcomes evil by allowing itself to be victimized without striking back. This makes us "perfect" just as our "Father which is in Heaven is perfect." Matt. 5:48.

Romans 8:37 is often quoted for the purpose of conquering our enemies. But read the text carefully: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Rom. 8:35-39.

The victory in this passage refers to staying in the love of Christ by not allowing the trials of life to separate us from God. The conflict, then, is not about conquering our enemies with force, but rather about abiding in the continual agape-love of God. Abiding in His love doesn't make us dualistic conquerors. Instead, it makes us "more" (better, greater, truer) than any conqueror could ever be.

Just what is it that needs conquering anyway? Christ has always already overcome, forgiven, and reconciled the world to Himself. He did this by absorbing all the venom of our sin-nature into Himself at the Cross. He did this without any retaliation or wrath towards His attackers. In this non-dualistic act of "resisting not evil," He conquered the world with forgiveness and love. Our calling is to realize and recognize Jesus' completed victory

and then to rest in it with our whole being. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest." Heb. 4:9-11.

The Sabbath rest is merely resting in the always already accomplished work of the Cross. No more competing. No more challenging. No more fighting. No more violence - - verbal, physical, or mental. In their place will abide the peace of The Jesus Mood, which transcends all Duality. Like the majestic eagle which is able to use its mighty wings to fly above and beyond all storm clouds, so too are we able to fly on eagle's wings above all the Duality clouds of This\That uncertainty into the high Heaven of imperative faith. Theologians call this Christus Victor - Christ already victorious over all the powers of evil!

Duality #2: This or That

The second type of Duality we will look at is This or That. What we have in our fallen state is freedom of choice. What we crave as Christians is freedom from choice. We want pure, simple, and natural obedience to the Holy Spirit's direction for all things. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Rom. 8:14.

Choice itself is the problem. The fundamental problem is not what we choose, but that we choose. To live by our

own choices is cursed self-righteousness. To live in the Spirit is to live by God's righteousness. Again, choice is the root problem. We choose and choose and choose and choose and choose - - choosing ourselves to death in the process. This is what cursed self-righteousness is - taking it upon ourselves to "choose" our own way as God (Gen. 3:5). Adam fell into death when he started living by the "choosing of good and evil" instead of by the "hearing of faith" (Gal. 3:2,5).

William Law said it best: "Our own will separates us from God. Or, rather, our own will is separation from God." Do you see? We were not created to choose between This or That. We were created to obey love's call. The love of God is to continually constrain and compel us at all times. The Greek word for "choose" is "hairesis" and is translated in the New Testament as "heresy," which is a label synonymous with spiritual error (Gal. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:1). Choosing from among alternatives is earthly, sensual and demonic (Jas. 3:15). Allowing the Holy Spirit in us to resolve all our decisions (Phil. 2:13) is the wisdom from above which is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (Jas. 3:17). Count me in!

But aren't we supposed to learn Bible precepts so that we can know what conduct to choose in our lives? No! The Apostle Paul knew Bible precepts up and down and front and back. Yet, in Romans 7, Paul tells us "choosing" will never work righteousness-- never. "For we know that the

law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that, I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin." Rom.7:14-25.

Paul's power of choice brought him death and failure. "Choosing" is a Satanic snare that keeps us from the "hearing of faith." In the Spirit, there is nothing to choose, only unctions to obey. In "choosing" there are always "two" things, whereas in the hearing of faith there is only "one" thing - - obedience. But, isn't the decision to obey a choice? No, I want to draw a distinction between decisions and choices.

Choices, as I am using the word, are "This or That" selections between two external options based on natural reasoning and understanding. Decisions, on the other hand, are internal resolutions to yield to the Holy Spirit's prompting and guidance. The Holy Spirit may illuminate reasons in giving us understanding about the dynamics involved in the decision, but the decision itself is not reason-based. It may be reason-enhanced, but never reason-based.

As Meister Eckhart said, "The just man has no reason for doing what he does." This is because the just man is led by the Spirit of God, a Spirit which is above, beyond, and greater than any reason-based precept. The wisdom of God seems foolish to man. The wisdom of man is foolish to God. In fact, the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men. For man, to live by choice is to live by foolishness. When we renounce "choice," we are enabled to clearly receive urgings, promptings, and resolutions from the Holy Spirit. In other words, renounce "choice" and you will hear God's "voice." The voice of the Holy Spirit leading you in all your ways.

I have seven children. Sometimes, it feels like I am running a small country. When I get trapped in Duality, I often feel relentless pressure to choose, choose, and choose. It wears me down and out, and I end up mentally paralyzed, depressed, and self-condemning about what I have wrongly chosen, what I am not choosing, or about what I need to choose. However, when I am strong in

the Holy Spirit, I don't think in terms of choice. The Holy Spirit leads me by unction - an inner knowing and sure prompting. I feel no pressure, no condemnation, no Romans 7 angst. Instead, I flow in peace, joy, and goodness. I am able to be completely present in the moment, ready and available for God's love to move me.

Whenever self-awareness grips me, self-doubt and self-condemnation follow - I have just entered the Romans 7 "zone." The good news is that Romans 8 is nearby, ready to save me from all condemnation through the life of the Spirit. Romans 8 tells me that in Christ there is no condemnation (v.1), no sin (v.2), no death (v.2), no carnal mindedness (v.6), and no defeat (v.37). In Christ, there is only life (v.2), righteousness (v.4), spiritual mindedness (v.6), peace (v.6), physical quickenings (v.11), continual leading by the Holy Spirit (v.14), Abba intimacy (v.15), Holy Spirit witness (v.16), Holy Spirit strengthening (v.26) and the inseparable love of Christ (v.35-39).

Am I saying reason, choice, and logic play no part in everyday life? Of course not. Reason has a supporting role but not the starring role. Walking in the Spirit, the hearing of faith, the life of God in Christ Jesus - the star of this glorious stage is not reason but love. Love trumps reason. It illogically leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650), the father of modern philosophy and science, believed in nothing that scientific reason could not empirically prove. Descartes believed that his ability to reason and doubt justified and proved his own existence. His self-consciousness and ability to make dualistic choices are what he based his whole system of philosophy on. Reason, doubt, and the ability to choose form this unholy trinity of spiritless living.

In his own words, Descartes' analysis was, "to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so, and to reject as absolutely false everything as to which I could imagine the least ground of doubt." This attitude, called "Cartesian Doubt," rejects everything the mind is unable to fully prove by scientific method. Daniel Boorstin, in his book The Seekers, writes that Descartes, by "starting with doubt as the catalyst of his philosophy, he makes the doubter the center of his universe."

Boorstin concludes that Descartes' motto, "I think, therefore I am," is better described as, "I doubt, therefore I am." How similar this attitude is to that of doubting Thomas: "But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples, therefore, said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jn. 20:24-25.

Descartes discounted all miracles, mysteries, and supernatural experiences because the mind of man can't prove them by reason. What Descartes changed with one fell philosophical swoop was both the object and source of man's faith. The object of man's faith is no longer God but man's own intellect and ability to choose and doubt. Man's way of dualistically thinking becomes his own God. The source of man's faith is no longer the heart, but the mind. Man only believes what he can intellectually prove to himself. Thus, Descartes removed both God from the center and faith from the heart. In their place, man was put in the center while faith was dualistically exiled, dissected, and mutated into the realm of "This or That" intellect. Now, dualistic choice was king. To be or not to be. To believe or not to believe. To choose This or That.

The Apostle Paul started from a fallen place of radical Duality where "choosing" circumcision or uncircumcision meant everything, "choosing" to eat kosher or unkosher meant everything, and "choosing" to obey or not obey every jot and tittle of the law meant everything. However, hallelujah, Paul ended in a place of divine oneness where "choosing" circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing (1 Cor. 7:19), "choosing" to eat clean or unclean means nothing (Rom. 14:14; 1 Cor. 6:12) and "choosing" to obey or not obey every jot and tittle of the Old Testament law means nothing (Gal. 2:21–3:25).

Finally, Paul dispels all Duality in the following passage: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Gal. 3:26-29.

Paul finally saw that the problem wasn't what we choose, but that we choose. We don't choose God. We allow ourselves to be chosen of God. We don't choose God. We yield to His decisions already formulated in us and for us.

We don't choose God. We "lassen" Him. Lassen is a German word used by philosopher Martin Heidegger to describe the spiritual act of "letting and releasing" as opposed to the carnal act of "taking and using." Martin Luther and the Anabaptists used this term to describe the theology for a "letting loose" of one's self unto God in an attitude of total dependence, humility, and trust. Whereas "choosing" wrongly attempts to seize the things of God, "lassening" rightly seeks to yield to the Spirit of God in all our ways.

Duality #3: This for That

The third type of Duality we will consider is This for That. This is the curse of "works righteousness," where we try to make things happen with our own efforts. What

"this" must I perform to get the "that" I want? How do I "earn" the blessing and love of God? How do I "earn" the blessing and love of men?

This for That Duality is ruled by the Latin term "quid pro quo," which essentially means "something for something" or "one thing in return for another." Our first thought toward any desired goal is usually, "What must I do to obtain the desired result?"

This form of Duality is trapped in causality. How can I cause my desires to be accomplished? The "law" became cursed when men started viewing it as a way to cause God's favor. Men wrongly use the law as a means to accomplish an end. In contrast, God uses the end to allow the means. Galatians and Romans clearly teach us that "the law" kills us when we view obedience to it as the cause of our righteousness. Rather, God gives us the end result first, the life of our indwelling Christ, to then operate within us to fulfill the means of righteousness.

Do you see this critical distinction? Duality says I cause my own righteousness by choosing to obey the law – i.e., I pay the price of obedience. In contrast, true Christianity says Jesus Christ is my righteousness, which now allows me to fulfill the law by the hearing of faith – i.e., Jesus freely gives me His power to be obedient.

Thus, true obedience is not the cause of spiritual power, but rather true obedience is the freely given fruit of spiritual power. This difference makes all the difference.

The ends (Jesus' life) produce the means (spiritual obedience), rather than the means (legalistic/dualistic obedience) producing the ends (right standing before God). Righteousness produces obedience, not vice versa.

This for That Duality is also the Spirit of "Mammon," which sees all things as transactional. I must pay "this" for "that" to happen. This is what drives financial markets, governments, political movements, and social standing. Under this warped view, people are no more than bargaining chips to be used for private gain. All events and relationships are seen as potential assets we use to obtain our wants. We view each other as resources to accomplish a goal. This is why our relationships are so conditional and fragile. We discard others when they stop being an asset to our desires. How shallow. How petty. You can't interact with an asset in any meaningful way. You can't develop an unbreakable bond of love with an asset. You can only use an asset up to get something else you want.

Jesus said we can't serve God and Mammon. In other words, the Mammon-based Duality of This for That doesn't work in the Kingdom of God. My heart breaks as I see people unable to receive the things of God because they serve Mammon with their greed or fear. Even though these people heartily agree with the truths of God, they can't abide in spiritual peace because strongholds of financial lust or financial worry dominate their thoughts. These strongholds become strangle-holds which literally

choke out the Word of God. Satan lured Adam and Eve with the apple of lack. Satan convinced them they were missing something big! God was keeping something from them - power to be "as God." If they would only eat the fruit, Satan claimed, then this act would "cause" them to become gods. They bought the lie and attempted to "cause" their own destiny apart from God. The great downward spiral began and continues to this day.

The bottom line with This for That Duality is that it pressures us to continually "choose" and "cause" our own righteousness rather than "resting" in the righteousness and resolve of Christ. Whereas some famous philosophers like Aristotle and Leibniz argued for the supremacy of causality and choice, others like David Hume argued that no absolute certainty can ever exist with causality and choice.

Quantum physicists side with Hume's approach as they have discovered that causality is not king and that there is an inherent level of uncertainty and unpredictability which underlies all reality. In fact, Quantum Physics provides the ultimate Duality-breaker by proving that all things - me, you, the furniture, an electron - we are all simultaneously both a particle and a wave. This truth is impossible to a dualistic mindset, which sees "particle" and "wave" as mutually exclusive terms.

Duality just doesn't work in Quantum Physics. Quantum Physics says that the Duality of insisting on knowing

two things simultaneously makes certainty impossible, because the more accurately one member of the pair is known, the less accurately the other is known. Quantum Physics has proved that you cannot simultaneously know with certainty where an electron is (position) and where it is going (momentum). Moreover, the electron itself can't know where it is (position) and where it is going (momentum), not with certainty.

The price for living in Duality is carnal certainty. Duality, choice, and causality are the doomed dynamics of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They may work temporarily, for a season, for a time. But, they cannot work eternally because they lack the certainty of The Jesus Mood. They rob us of the one and only thing we must have to walk with God-- certainty.

While the philosophers and physicists continue to duel about Duality, one thing is apparent. The eternal certainty of the Jesus Mood cannot be "caused" by the choices of men. We merely "lassen" (let and release) the Jesus Mood up, through, and out of us. In the Kingdom of God, there is nothing to be chosen or caused, only eternal life to let and release.

Duality #4: This from That

The fourth type of Duality is This from That. This is the Duality that blames or boasts. It points the finger at what is and then assigns blame or credit. If something bad appears, the finger of blame condemns the selected

source. If something good appears, then this Duality jumps in to take credit for it. This is the mindset that blameshifts, condemns, boasts, and self-justifies. Under this Duality, finger-pointing is King: "Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity." Is. 58:9.

The "putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity" can refer to the finger of blaming or the finger of boasting. The finger of blaming is pointed at others. The finger of boasting is pointed at oneself. The finger of blaming says, "I accuse." The finger of boasting says, "I deserve."

Satan used both these dynamics to lure Adam and Eve to the tree of deathly Duality. Satan pointed the finger of blame at God, "accusing" the Lord of wrong motives in wanting to keep the man and woman ignorant and powerless (Gen. 3:1- 7). Satan also lured Adam and Eve to adopt the mindset that they "deserved better" than God's provision.

Do you see? "I accuse" and "I deserve" form the root system of Duality. This root system spreads into our every thought and every emotion until we are slaves to selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-rule. Self is enthroned as the judge of all things, endlessly "pointing the finger and speaking vanity."

Jesus taught that we are not to judge others for bad things, nor are we to take credit for any good thing. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matt. 7:1-2. "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do." Lk. 17:10.

The blame game. The fame game. Gross over-simplification. Men blame each other for everything bad. Or, men usurp the credit for everything good. Adam and Eve sin. Eve blames the serpent (Gen. 3:13). Adam blames the woman and God-- "it was the woman You gave me" (Gen. 3:12). In the next chapter, their son Cain becomes crestfallen when he doesn't receive the credit he thinks he deserves from God (Gen. 4:5). His recourse? He blames his brother Abel-- and kills him (Gen. 4:8).

Do you see? This from That must accuse someone or something else for all misfortune. Blame-shifting. Blame-creating. It avoids personal responsibility by pointing the finger of blame elsewhere. Conversely, when credit for the good is at stake, this Duality jumps up to take the limelight.

Duality #5: This and That

False unity. False oneness. Demonic unity. Demonic oneness. Man-made unity. Man-made oneness. It's all the

same. This and That is the Duality falsely disguised as oneness, which makes it the trickiest of all the Duality types. It claims it is not dualistic, but in truth, it is the most dualistic of all. Instead of putting This versus That, choosing This or That, paying This for That, claiming This from That; This and That blends opposites together in a poisonous stew of "earthly, sensual, demonic" wisdom which produces confusion and every evil thing (Jas. 3:15-16). This false unity comes from the self-will and natural thinking of men, enabled by demonic power.

This Duality is most easily seen in New Age spirituality, which is pervasive in today's society. There are New Age gurus on every street corner, bookshelf, television station, and talk show. They all proclaim the same basic truths - we are all one - God is all and all is God - all division is false - we need just to embrace our oneness with all things and we will find our own divinity. This is what Gnosticism taught two thousand years ago, and it is no different today. The New Age teaching is Gnosticism repackaged. Both operate in the deadly Duality of This and That.

But it's not just New Age. Eastern religion and philosophy both claim a false oneness which blends everything into one thing. Yin\Yang is the concept which falsely blends opposites like good\evil, masculine\feminine, strength\yieldedness, and rigidness\fluidity all into one thing. These contrasting qualities become different sides of the same coin. When

we walk in "the way," or the "tao," of "yin\yang," or This and That, we realize that all things are both good and evil, masculine and feminine, strong and yielded, rigid and fluid. The "tao" blends all these contrasting qualities into "one" quality. We now seek to recognize the oneness of all things through their yin-yang aspects.

What is the problem with this? Is New Age/Eastern/Gnostic "oneness" the same as Christian "oneness?" No! Only in Christ do all things reconcile, cohere, and have their true being (Col. 1:16-17). All other "oneness" is artificial, empty, and lonely because it is devoid of the personality and centrality of Jesus. False oneness brings false peace, false wisdom, and false spirituality.

When I see New Age gurus weaving their spells of "oneness" over gullible listeners, I see a glazed look come over the faces in the audience. They look serene, but only in the way a Hindu cow passively grazes and gazes its life away in an empty pasture.

God is a person. That person is Jesus. As a person, Jesus obviously has a personality. This personality now indwells all Christians. This personality is one personality - and only one. It is a love personality. It is a hope personality. It is a faith personality. The personality of Jesus reveals the personality of the Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit reveals the personality of Jesus. The body of

Christ reveals the personality of the Holy Spirit. What oneness, what unity, and what inter-dependence!

Contrast this with New Age views, which claim that God is not a personality to relate with, but rather is a thing, an impersonal force with which we are to casually connect. New Age\Eastern\Gnostic thought is so barren and lonely. Whenever I have read or listened to their claims, I feel a profound sadness at the loneliness and isolation this false teaching produces. Their true fruit is not "oneness" but "aloneness."

Christian "oneness," on the other hand, produces intimate fellowship with the "otherness" of God. Even though we are called to be "one" with God in Christ, we are not called to be the same as God. This is at the heart of the matter - New Age teaches you that you are God, I am God, we are God. They teach that we are the same as God, the very same, the exact same. This outrageous claim is not true "oneness," it is true blasphemy.

Christian "oneness" teaches we have our being with God and in Christ, but does not teach we are the "same" as God, the "same" as Jesus, or the "same" as the Holy Spirit. While we can live continually in full fellowship with and in the Godhead, we are not the Godhead. To reckon oneself the same as God takes away all interaction with God. If man is the same as God, he needs only relate to and love himself. There is no "other" to relate with, to

worship toward, to hear from, to go to, to lean on, or be comforted by. Self is all, and all is self.

Don't embrace the dangerous Duality of This and That. Don't blend holy and unholy into a false oneness, a man-made oneness where we situate ourselves "as God." This was the snare in the Garden of Eden. Satan promised that by eating the fruit of the tree of Duality, the knowledge of good and evil, they would then exist "as God." What a lie! They became worshipers of "self" who could only hide behind fig leaves of blame, shame, and fear. True repentance is yielding ourselves back to the true "oneness" of God, the sole Lordship of Christ, the New Testament Shema - - Hear O Christians, the Lord our God is ONE - - one faith, one hope, one baptism, one Lord, "One God and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Eph. 4:4-6.

One final warning about the Duality of This and That. When we attribute light and darkness, good and evil, love and wrath to God's nature, we are dualistically blending things which must not be blended. God is only light. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." 1 Jn. 1:5. We must not blend darkness into God's nature. Blending darkness with light causes Spiritual schizophrenia, which the Bible labels "double-mindedness." Let not this man expect to receive anything from the Lord (Jas. 1:6-8). Light and darkness do not mix - at all. In Christ, "is no darkness at all."

God is not evil. He is good, only good, always good. God has no connection to evil. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” Jas. 1:13-17. This most precise passage on this point instructs us to “Let no man say” God has any connection with evil. It also admonishes us, “Do not err,” by saying that anything other than good and perfection ever comes from God. “God is love." 1Jn.4:8. Jesus came not to judge the world with wrath, but to save the world with love. (Jn. 12:47).

Scriptures don’t say God is wrath, but that God IS love. Jesus was God’s message to mankind of “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” Lk. 2:14. Wrath is our rejection of God-- our own neglect of our so great a salvation. Wrath is the place we give to Satan through sin, hardness of heart, and unbelief. Wrath is not God, nor is wrath from God, of God, or by God. Wrath is man-generated, Satan-dominated, and fear-perpetuated. Jesus is the cure for this wrath, not the cause of it. Never blend love and wrath into God’s nature.

Never blend good and evil into God's nature. Never blend light and dark into God's nature.

The word "blend" often reveals dualistic thinking because it still views things in terms of two. It just seeks to artificially mix the two so that they will appear as one. Rather than blending all things together as they are, we are to purify our hearts and minds before the throne of God. All impure thoughts and emotions are not to be "blended" but "transcended." All that is impure is to be removed, not by battling wickedness on its own dualistic terms, but rather by cleaving to the precious Jesus in all our ways. "Therefore thus saith the LORD, If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth." Jer. 15:19.

We just need to be careful not to pull "the duality" trigger too quickly. The concept is largely misunderstood.

Again, the definition of Duality is any mindset that is ruled and regulated by two eternal and supreme principles. Light and dark. Good and evil. Spirit and matter. BUT, and this is a huge "but," BOTH these dynamics must be EQUALLY supreme and of ETERNAL duration.

So, believing that there is a qualitative battle or conflict between light and dark, good and evil, Spirit and matter is NOT truly dualistic unless we believe there will never be a clear winner.

New Testament Christianity may believe that good and evil conflict, but Christianity doesn't believe they eternally battle. Satan will be finally defeated on every level of being (and actually already is). Evil will be no more when the New Jerusalem manifests. TRUE Duality would have Satan and God ETERNALLY battle throughout all the eons to come. Christianity nowhere teaches that.

Christianity may believe "matter," as it exists now in this decay-infested earth age, has some deathly flaw ingrained in it which results in all of decaying creation groaning for eternal life. But Christianity doesn't believe that "matter" will be flawed eternally. Quite the contrary, Christianity believes all "matter" will eventually put on immortality as the death dynamic is purged out and away from all "matter."

The point is not to be too quick on the draw to call something dualistic until we have applied the true definitional analysis. Are the two conflicting or contrasting mindsets BOTH equally "supreme" and "eternal" in duration? If not, then Duality is really not present.

Let me throw another duality curve to be cautious about. Hebrew thought erroneously believes itself to be completely non-dualistic. Their Shema ("the Lord our God is One!"), as wonderful as it is on one level, does not dispense with the Duality present in their other

theological writings. Most importantly in this regard, Judaism doesn't believe that Satan is a cosmic rebel opposed to God on every level, but rather is an obedient servant angel with a tough job as God's official minister of wrath.

Judaism believes that to believe in a Satan OPPOSED to God is a dualistic disaster. But they are wrong on that point. They are the ones who, on this one level, are displaying thought which is "disastrously dualistic." This is BECAUSE they believe that God ETERNALLY and SUPREMELY will always be BOTH good and evil, BOTH light and dark, and BOTH loving and wrathful--never changing and never anything less than completely sovereign. So, even though they may not appear dualistic at first sight, this aspect of their theology renders them "ultimate" dualists because they believe God's nature is eternally dualistic.

The Conclusion of the Matter

All our bad moods come from Duality. This versus That leaves us violent, competitive, and angry. This or That leaves us continually focused on choosing between external appearances rather than yielding to the inner leading of the Spirit. This for That leaves us trapped in work-based living where we must cause our own destiny. This from That leaves us endlessly blaming or bragging about current conditions. Lastly, This and That tries to artificially blend all things into one stew, a stew which is

ultimately poisoned with demonic deception and Godless living.

As I said in the opening paragraph, Duality is like the Spanish throwing weapon known as the "bolas." This weapon consists of two weighted balls tied on both ends of long interconnected cords. The weapon is hurled in a spinning motion, which causes the cords to entangle around the limbs of the victim. The weighted balls continue to cause the straps to entwine around the victim until the balls themselves knock the victim senseless. Satan, likewise, hurls mindsets at us weighted with two supreme fixed principles of This\That. These mindsets wrap around our thoughts and begin to bind our thinking until one or both of the twirling concepts knocks us spiritually senseless. We must learn to "duck" when bolas of Duality are hurled at us. Understanding the five forms of This\That Duality will allow us to develop quicker spiritual reflexes to duck away from danger.

These five forms of Duality rob us of faith, certainty, peace, love, and uninhibited interaction with God. The Jesus Mood transcends all dualistic notions of This\That by abiding in the "always already" Kingdom of Heaven. In this blessed spiritual stratosphere, we are no longer enslaved to violence, choice, Mammon, blame, or self. We are free to live by the "hearing of faith." Faith comes by hearing God. Hearing comes from a listening heart-interaction with the Holy Spirit. This is the faith

we are to live by, the faith we are to grow in, and the faith we are to pass on to others.

The purpose of understanding these five forms of Duality is to help us better recognize and take captive our toxic mindsets, which hinder our walk with God. Duality snares are always just a thought away, so we must train ourselves to be ever vigilant in our thought life.

Island spotters in the Pacific during World War II would have a chart of enemy airplane shapes, which they would refer to when planes were seen passing overhead. If the shape in the sky matched the shape on the chart, then the spotter would radio that an enemy plane had been spotted.

Learning these five types of Duality will also allow us to chart enemy mindsets as they seek to fly overhead in our own thought life. Once spotted, we can act decisively to confer with the Holy Spirit and take them captive to the obedience of Christ. "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." 2 Cor. 10:3-6.

When Duality is broken, we are free to hear God's undistorted wisdom for our lives. When Paul saw that in Christ there was no Jew or Greek, male or female, bond or slave, he was then free to see all men as children of God (Gal. 3:28). When Paul saw that in Christ neither circumcision nor un-circumcision availed anything, he was set free to become a new creation (Gal. 6:15). When Paul saw that in Christ clean and unclean foods were both acceptable if eaten in faith, he was set free to enjoy the fruits of all creation (Rom. 14).

The mental\emotional\physical violence of This versus That is broken by turning the other cheek and blessing our enemies. The pressure to externally choose This or That is broken by maintaining a single eye to stay yielded to the inner leading of the Holy Spirit. The works-based manipulation of This for That is broken by the recognition that God has "always already" provided us all things for life and godliness and that we are to abide in the Sabbath rest of God. The finger-pointing accusations of This from That are broken by "judging not" and by "boasting not." Lastly, the forced blending of holy and vile by This and That is broken by cleaving only to the precious purposes of God in and for all things.

On a personal level, "Duality-breakers" have continued to bless and liberate my thinking. I recently discovered that someone I considered a friend of mine had been speaking vicious lies about me behind my back. My dualistic flesh wanted to fight (This versus That). I

wanted my name vindicated and his name condemned. I knew this was coming from Duality and not from God. As I waited on the Lord, all I could hear the Lord lead me to do was confess over and over again, "The Lord is my shield. The Lord is my shield. The Lord is my shield!" I did. He was. The venom for vengeance left my body, and I have nothing but pity and goodwill toward the person in question.

I was able to forgive him because he didn't know what he was doing. Nobody who sins really knows what they are doing. I too often don't even know what I am doing--except when I am yielding to the Holy Spirit's inner promptings.

On another recent occasion, my wife and I were presented with two apparent choices regarding one of our children's lives. We struggled not to analyze the situation as a This or That choice. I failed. My wife succeeded. As the deadline approached, I reasoned out the choice my flesh reckoned was the most logical.

When I informed my wife of what I had decided, she lovingly disagreed and said she didn't have peace about my "choice." Twenty-four hours before the deadline, my wife heard from the Lord what the path of blessing was, and we obeyed. I knew she was right. She had stayed out of Duality and not walked by sight. The Lord will direct our paths in and for all things if we will acknowledge Him in all our ways and wait for His leading. "Trust in the

LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Prov. 3:5-6. Don't be anxious. God's answer will bloom before your eyes. His answer will present itself.

My greatest daily challenge from Duality comes in the This from That area. My flesh cries out daily to blame, blame, blame. When I was younger, I tended to boast, boast, boast. The older I have become, the less I boast but the more I blame. However, they are both just as dualistically disgusting. It is so easy to point the finger at the drop of a hat. However, over the last few years, I have experienced great deliverance in this area. Through the revelation of Philippians 4:8 PLENITUDE, I am eliminating the blame game from my thought life. The following verse has worked powerfully to renew my mind: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Phil. 4:8.

I shared earlier in the chapter about my struggles in This or That Duality, where the pressure of "choosing" has in the past paralyzed me in condemnation, particularly in the area of parenting. However, this Duality type is also threatening in the area of finances, where pressure to "choose" to spend or not to spend can strangle out all

hope from the heart. Only the peace of God can save us here. "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." 1 Pet. 5:7.

Lastly, some years ago, the New Age Duality of This and That attacked very close to home. I read some New Age books, and they poisoned me. Thankfully, the Lord did a quick work to reveal the deception and allow me to repent. These books sought to lead me away from the centrality and preeminence of Christ, replacing them with the centrality and preeminence of men. The New Age spirituality of men is vile and cannot, must not, and will not blend with the New Creation in Christ Jesus.

One of the Hebrew words translated in the Bible as "wait" means to gather together and twist into one bundle. When we wait upon the Lord, what we are really doing is purging out Duality by gathering up all things before us and tying them up into one bundle for the Lord. He is the Lord of all, one Lord over all, through all, and in all. When we, as spiritual eagles, fly above the storm clouds of Duality, we will know peace, certainty, and joy beyond understanding. God's ways are higher, better, stronger, and truer than our ways. His ways are Duality-free. His way is the Tree of Life. Our fallen way stems from the dualistic Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Our Duality trees can and must be uprooted by the Spirit of God.

There is a term used to describe the difficulty in avoiding Duality-- "sitting on the razor's edge." Duality is a mental razor that is always just a thought away, waiting to cut and divide anything into two things. But, by the Spirit of God, we are able to "hover" above the Duality razor and stay single-eyed on the one voice of God toward every situation. Nicolaus of Cusa (1401-1464) was one of the great German Christian theologians and thinkers. He wrote on Philosophy, Theology, Mathematics, and Astronomy.

More importantly, he was the first Christian thinker to understand and write extensively about the dangers of Duality. He wrote frequently about the Christian's need to "hover" above Duality by cleaving to the transcendent oneness of God. Nicolaus was convinced that this way of thinking was the only mindset compatible with true Christianity. Only this mindset can allow us to fully "rest" in the completed works of God.

Cleave to the oneness of God. Remember, behold but one in all things; it is the second that leads you astray. We must learn to penetrate all things and find Jesus there - - His purpose, His love, His willingness, His readiness, His ability, His provision, His authority, His Heavenly Father, His Holy Spirit - - this Jesus, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in Heaven, and that are in Earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all

things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have preeminence." Col. 1:15-18.

Jesus' wonderful mood inhabits the Earth right now, waiting to be released into each and every situation of our lives, into each and every corner of our souls, and into each and every pore of our skin. That is good and non-dualistic news!

Chapter Ninety-Two

THE EARLY CHURCH DID NOT BELIEVE HELL LASTS FOREVER

Today, many people disagree on how guilty criminals should be treated. Is the purpose of punishment, the argument goes, to rehabilitate the criminal by reforming his character? Or, rather, is the purpose of punishment to inflict eye-for-an-eye retaliation on the wrongdoer? Put another way, is our motive for punishment revenge or rescue?

This same analysis can be applied to God's purpose for Hell. Is God's motive in allowing sinners to go to Hell a form of "revenge" upon the sinner, or is God's motive rather to ultimately "rescue" the sinner from his own fallen nature? Which purpose better aligns with the nature of God revealed in Jesus Christ?

Well, the majority of the early Church believed that Hell was a place where God would rescue, reform, and reconcile all lost sinners back unto Himself. The process of Hell was intense, thorough, critical, painful, agonizing, and anguishing. But, it was ultimately restorative as each and every sinner was led through and past their own Hellish valley of sin and death, and into a deep and heartfelt place of Godly repentance.

The early Church had a significantly different view of Hell than much of the Church does today. Hell's purpose, for the majority of the Church fathers, was seen as purifying rather than punishing, restoring rather than torturing, healing rather than destroying. They believed Hell was "God's crisis-management for lost souls." Hell was for all those who did not authentically receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior during their earthly lives.

The early Church believed God's Hellfire was not inflicted to destroy the lost, but rather to ultimately save them. God's "fire" was WISE in that it revealed, cleansed, and cured the lost soul of all the false identities accumulated during their fallen lifetimes. The "wood, hay and stubble" of these false identities would be "burned off" of the lost soul, but they themselves would "be saved, yet so as by fire." 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

Hell, from this viewpoint, then, was a rocky but redemptive journey to repentance and restoration. Hell

was still seen as infinitely intense and unimaginably painful-- just not eternal.

Ebenezer Scrooge's nightmarish journey as described in the classic "Christmas Carol" would be an illustration of what such a redemptive journey through Hell might look like. For Scrooge, his journey was intensely revealing, painful, and heartbreaking, but ultimately redemptive. Scrooge was not even aware that his own repentance and redemption were the Lord's endgame. He was too busy suffering at the realization of his past, present, and future sins. And, in fact, Scrooge's journey appeared to be outside of time as we know it. His whole pitiful life was played out before him in just a few earthly hours, yet for him it appeared to last a very long time.

Would God not have the same type of cosmic "elbow room" to take our souls on such a "Scrooge-like" post-mortem journey to repentance? Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation, certainly allowed for this possibility: "God forbid that I should limit the time of acquiring faith to the present life. In the depth of the Divine mercy there may be opportunity to win it in the future." Martin Luther's letter to Hanseu Von Rechenberg, 1522.

Here is a quick historical survey of the EARLY CHURCH regarding their beliefs about HELL:

THE FIRST 500 YEARS: In the first five centuries, there were six known theological schools. Four of

them taught that all men would EVENTUALLY be rescued from Hell: these being the theological schools at Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, and Edessa/Nisbis. One school, Ephesus, taught Annihilationism (that sinners are totally incinerated into nothingness in Hell). Only one theological school, Rome/Carthage, taught eternal punishment. Source: The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Universalism entry, p. 96, Baker Book House.

"The main Patristic supporters of the apokatastasis theory, such as Bardaisan, Clement, Origen, Didymus, St. Anthony, St. Pamphilus Martyr, Methodius, St. Macrina, St. Gregory of Nyssa (and probably the two other Cappadocians), St. Evagrius Ponticus, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, St. John of Jerusalem, Rufinus, St. Jerome and St. Augustine (at least initially However, even after abandoning the doctrine of apokatastasis himself, Augustine very interestingly recognised that a great deal of Christians in his day did embrace it, 'indeed the vast majority' (immo quam plurimi). These very numerous Christians, 'albeit not denying the Holy Scripture, do not believe in eternal torments' (Ench. ad Laur. 29) page 683]), Cassian, St.Isaac of Nineveh, St.John of Dalyatha, Ps. Dionysius the Areopagite, probably St. Maximus the Confessor, up to John the Scot Eriugena,28, and many others, grounded their Christian doctrine of apokatastasis first of all in the Bible." Page 11, The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis:

A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena, by Ilaria L.E. Ramelli (2013). Ramelli's work is comprehensive (800 pages) on this, and her credentials are beyond reproach. I daresay it's the most comprehensive and scholarly book on the subject ever written. She is working on a shorter user user-friendly version soon to be published.

1ST CENTURY: PAUL. It is interesting to note that Paul never used the word Hell in any of his writings, though he was considered the theologian of the New Testament. He spoke of God's post-mortem purging fire in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, but never of Hell per se. The Gospel of John, the disciple perhaps closest to Jesus' heart, never used the word Hell in his Gospel. It is also interesting to note that the Book of Acts never mentions the word Hell, except to speak of Jesus' liberation FROM it. Acts NEVER uses the word Hell to describe any part of the Christian message, which established the Church. The following passages suggest Paul's seminal thinking on the eventual and ultimate salvation of all men: Romans 5:17,18; 10:9-17; 11:25-33; 14:11; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 15:22-28; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 4:10; Eph. 1:10; 4:1-10; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 1:20, 23; Heb. 2:9.

2ND CENTURY: CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA. Clement was the first to speak of God's fire as a "wise fire" which purges the sinner unto salvation. "God's punishments are

saving and disciplinary (in Hades) leading to conversions, and choosing rather the repentance than the death of the sinner, and especially since souls, although darkened by passions, when released from their bodies, are able to perceive more clearly because of their being no longer obstructed by the paltry flesh. We can set no limits to the agency of the Redeemer to redeem, to rescue, to discipline, is His work, and so will he continue to operate after this life." Clem. str. 5:14.90.4-91.2; see also 5.1.9.4; and hyp. (frg. In Stahlin, Clemens Alexandrians, 3:211).

3RD CENTURY: ORIGEN: "When the Son is said to be subject to the Father, the perfect restoration of the whole creation is signified, so also, when enemies are said to be subjected to the Son of God, the salvation of the conquered and the restoration of the lost is in that understood to consist." Origen, De Principiis, Book III, Chapter 5, Section 7, Anf, Vol. 4. Origen was the first Christian Systematic Theologian. A fundamental and essential element of his theology was the doctrine of the universal restoration of all fallen beings to their original holiness and union with God. God's mercy and goodness are all-inclusive and ultimately irresistible. Hellfire is corrective and purgative, not punitive and eternal. This doctrine was called Apocatastasis, "the restitution of all things" per Acts 3:21. Origen was the greatest enemy of Gnosticism (per his Against Celsus) and is considered the greatest theologian of the early Eastern Church. "There is hardly a major thinker who is not deeply indebted

to Origen. From the middle of the Twentieth Century, focused scholarly symposia of the Greek and Latin Church have once again begun to study and critically expound the rich Origenian legacy." The Westminster Handbook of Patristic Theology, WJK.

4TH CENTURY: GREGORY OF NYSSA: "What, therefore, is the scope of Paul's argument in this place [1 Cor. 15:28]? That the nature of evil, at length, be wholly exterminated, and divine, immortal goodness embrace within itself every rational creature; so that of all who were made by God, not one shall be excluded from his Kingdom. All the viciousness that, like a corrupt matter, is mingled in things, shall be dissolved and consumed in the furnace of purgatorial fire; and every thing that had its origin from God, shall be restored to its pristine state of purity." Tract, in Dictum Apostoli, Tunc etiam ipse Filius subjicietur, and c.p. 137, and seqq. Gregory was one of the three great Cappadocian Fathers who protected the doctrine of the Trinity from the Arians at the Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople.

5TH CENTURY: Theodore of Mopsuestia. "They who have chosen the good, shall, in the future world, be blessed and honored. But the wicked, who have committed evil

the whole period of their lives, shall be punished till they learn, that, by continuing in sin, they only continue in misery. And when, by this means, they shall have been

brought to fear God, and to regard Him with good-will, they shall obtain the enjoyment of His grace." Assemani Biblioth. Orient. Tom. iii. Par. i. p.323.

Church history is fairly clear that this view of Hell was not just the view of a few, but rather was the majority view of the Church.

Basil the Great (329-379) said that, "The MASS of men (Christians) say that there is to be an end of punishment to those who are punished." De Ascetics.

Saint Jerome (347-420) said, "I know that MOST persons understand the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate forgiveness of the devil and all rational creatures." Homily on Jonah.

Lastly, even Augustine (354-430), who vehemently opposed Universalism, acknowledged, "There are VERY MANY in our day, who though not denying the Holy Scriptures, do not believe in endless torments." Enchirdion cxii. (The Latin for "very many" is imo quam plurimi, which can be translated majority).

When the Church rejected this high view of God's goodness and replaced it with a view of God as an eternal torturer, the Dark Ages began, almost to the day. Ever since, there has remained a small, constant and stubborn strand of those imbedded in the Church who believe Hell is not an eternal torture chamber, but rather God's final crisis-center, a cosmic ER station where God performs

complicated, intense and painful surgery on our souls in order to remove all our false sin-identies accumulated over our lifetime.

The belief that Hell is "ultimately remedial and restorative" rather than "eternally torturous" can withstand any Scriptural challenge if you accept four premises, the same four premises widely accepted by the early Church.

PREMISE #1- JESUS DID NOT PREACH "ETERNAL PUNISHMENT" IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT!

"Eternal Punishment" is the term used in the English translation of the Bible on which most people base their view of eternal conscious torment in Hell. The term in the Greek is "kolasis aionios." If this term does indeed mean eternal punishment, then Hell would seem to be forever.

But, such is not the case. Let's first consider the opinion of the great Greek scholar William Barclay, who was professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University and the author of many commentaries and books, including a translation of the New Testament and the very popular Daily Study Bible Series. Barclay discusses this point regarding Matthew 25:46 in his well-known autobiography:

"One of the key passages is Matthew 25:46 where it is said that the rejected go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life. The Greek word for punishment is 'kolasis,' which was not originally an ethical word at all. It originally meant the pruning of trees to make them grow better. I think it is true to say that in all Greek secular literature 'kolasis' is never used of anything but 'remedial punishment.' The word for 'eternal' is aionios. It means more than everlasting, for Plato - who may have invented the word - plainly says that a thing may be everlasting and still not be aionios. The simplest way to put it is that aionios cannot be used properly of anyone but God; it is the word uniquely, as Plato saw it, of God. Eternal punishment is then literally that kind of remedial punishment which it befits God to give and which only God can give."

To summarize then, the Greek word "Aionios," which is sometimes translated as "everlasting" in Scripture (as in "everlasting punishment"), does NOT in fact mean "unending or everlasting in quantity of time." Rather, "Aionios" speaks to an "indeterminate age set by God alone." The word refers to a certain quality (not quantity) of being-- whether it be "aionios life" or "aionios remedial-punishment." Aionios is always qualified by what it is describing.

For instance, the word "great," when applied to a merciful sentence imposed by a kind-hearted judge, might refer to a small amount of time in jail. Conversely, "great," when

applied to an atrocious crime, for which the judge throws the book at the defendant, might refer to a life sentence in jail.

Similarly, the duration and quality of aionios when applied to the life of God is entirely different than when it is applied to the chastening or punishment of God. "Great life" in God is certainly unending, since death will have been completely defeated, but the unending length is not the primary essence of that "Great life." Rather, the limitless quality of being totally at one with the Lord is the key aspect of this "Great life." On the other hand, "Great punishment" by God will not be unending since He punishes to correct and rehabilitate, and He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. 2 Pet. 3:9.

Life in God is not everlasting because it is aionios, but rather aionios is everlasting because it refers to life in God. Conversely, aionios punishment is not temporary because aionios means temporary, but rather aionios is temporary in this context since God's chastening is curative and incapable of being eternally resisted. "For his anger is but for a moment; His favor is for a lifetime: Weeping may tarry for the night, But joy cometh in the morning." Psalm 30:5.

David Bentley Hart, Eastern Orthodox theologian and Patristic scholar, notes that the early church fathers, who knew ancient koine Greek far better than do most

moderns, simply did NOT translate "aionios kolasis" as a phrase meaning "eternal punishment" to be applied to the duration and nature of Hell per Matthew 25:46.

Hart observes that ". . . patristic theologians as diverse as Origen, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Isaac of Nineveh saw in the phrase aionios kolasis (typically translated as 'eternal punishment,' but possible to read as 'correction for a long period' or 'for an age' or even 'in the age to come') no cause to conclude that Hell was anything but a temporary process of spiritual purification." Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies (Loc. 2059-61) Yale University Press (February 23, 2010).

Aionios then, by itself, means an "indeterminate age," not an "unending age." Only the context of the passage provides guidance as to the actual quality and duration of the age.

PREMISE #2- HELL AND HEAVEN ARE "OUTSIDE OF TIME" AS WE DEFINE IT!

Time to God is not the same thing as time to man. "Kairos" is the Greek term generally used to describe God's perfect timing. It is not run by a clock, but by the heart of God. "Chronos," by contrast, is the Greek term used to describe man's fallen timing. Karios is measured by love and meaning. Chronos is measured by clocks and calendars.

Kairos is measured by relational events, renewed thoughts, repentant hearts, and acts of love. Chronos, by contrast, is man's time measured apart from God. Chronos is linear clock time, which is running down this fallen world like a time bomb waiting to explode.

Chronos is the sand of our lives, slowly but surely emptying out our life force. Chronos is the process of dying. Chronos doesn't caress, doesn't change, and doesn't forgive. Chronos ages us, disappoints us, crushes us, and ultimately kills our bodies.

Kairos, by contrast, cures us, restores our youth, and allows us to be fully present in "the now" with our God.

The problem arises when men apply Chronos concepts to Kairos events. To label Heaven or Hell as "endless" means that it is being measured by man's time, which can't begin to grasp the Kairos reality involved.

Heaven is not Heaven because clocks will be ticking and ticking for all eternity without interruption. This Chronos concept that we will be sitting around stroking our harps forever and ever is not eternal life in the Kairos sense.

Eternal life in the Kairos sense means life of infinite quality and blessedness. It is life that has evicted death altogether. Chronos doesn't even exist anymore, where Kairos' life exists. This life doesn't extend time; it transcends it altogether.

So too, with Hell, it is not a Chronos reality but a Kairos event which will be determined by God alone. That God doesn't view time from Chronos' viewpoint is established by 2 Peter 3:8, which states, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." In fact, Revelation 10:6-7 says that when the seventh angel declares that "the mystery of God should be finished," that "there should be time (literally Chronos) no longer!"

Isn't it clear that both Heaven and Hell exist outside of time and space as we know it? Eternity is just a term to describe the limitless life of God, which operates apart from the constraints of time and space.

To use four-dimensional terms (length, width, height, and time) to describe 100-dimensional realities is completely inadequate. A Christian writer and theologian, Edwin A. Abbott, once wrote a book called "Flatland." It is a science fiction novel about a planet called Flatland where the inhabitants have only two dimensions - length and width. Since they lack height, they all appear as lines to each other. Some have more sides than others, but all still appear as simple lines.

One day, a three-dimensional being enters their world. He tries to explain three-dimensional reality, but the flatlanders can't understand it because all they know is two dimensions. Ultimately, the three-dimensional

messiah lifts one of the Flatlanders up and out of his two-dimensional reality. The flatlander now is astounded by the Heavenly reality of height that has always existed both above and beneath him. The two dimensions the flatlander did know have now been blended with the Heavenly truth of height, which now gives everything he knows limitless depth and beauty.

In this same way, we who live by Chronos can't grasp the eternal essences of Heaven and Hell until our Messiah lifts us up to spiritual realities which transcend the time and space limitations of our Flatland. Do we really believe that when Jesus descended into Hell to lead captivity captive and disarm all the demonic principalities and powers (Eph. 4:8-10; Col. 2:15), that this was done in linear Chronos time?

No, Jesus died once for all. What He did was outside of time and space. He died for ALL men-- past, present, and future. He preached (literally, evangelized) to all the dead in Hell-- past, present, and future (1 Pet. 4:6). If Jesus had done all this in

Chronos time, we could assume only that He paid for the sins of those who were in Hell as of 33 A.D. Since we know this can't be the case, we must toss Chronos' considerations out of our definitions of Heaven and Hell.

As A. W. Tozer said in his book, The Knowledge of the Holy: "Because God lives in an everlasting now, He has no past and no future. When time-words occur in the

Scriptures they refer to our time, not to His. When the four living creatures before the throne cry day and night, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come, they are identifying God with the flow of creature-life with its familiar three tenses; and this is right and good, for God has sovereignly willed so to identify Himself. But since God is uncreated, He is not Himself affected by that succession of consecutive changes we call time."

The work of Jesus by and through the Cross began in man's time (Chronos), but ended in God's time (Kairos). Jesus died once for all men for all times for all sins. Heaven and Hell are realms OUTSIDE of this present Chronos time.

When Jesus led captivity captive, He simultaneously rescued all men from every past Hell, every present Hell, and every future Hell. We must not apply terms of fallen time to describe God's limitless time. Chronos' terms of "quantity" of time, like unending or everlasting, simply do not properly define Kairos events like "aionios punishment" or "aionios life," both of which speak to "quality of time" rather than "quantity of time."

PREMISE #3- GOD'S FLAMES OF JUDGMENT SEEK TO HEAL US, NOT TORTURE US!

Like the fig leaves Adam and Eve wore to hide their nakedness from God, men wear sin-masks to keep their "real" naked selves covered and hidden from God. The

ugly truth is that there is something rotten in our souls at a subconscious level that wants to ignore and avoid God.

Satan helps us here by providing demonically empowered masks to blind and deform our hearts and minds. Like the disturbed teenager who self-mutilates by knife cuts into the flesh, we self-mutilate our souls, created in the image of God, by disfiguring them. We do this by donning demonic masks lined on the inside with razorblades of fear, doubt, and lust. God wants these sin-masks removed once and for all.

So, what becomes of our sin-masks, either in this life or the next? How are these masks dealt with, both in the short term and long term? Is there a way that in this lifetime we can rip all our masks off? Sure, this is what the Scriptures call sanctification.

Through the renewing of our minds by the Holy Spirit, we are able to progressively shed all our false selves, prideful pretenses, and forged identities. Those who persist in achieving this authenticity in the Lord receive rewards in this life and the next.

But what about those masks we never successfully cast away during this lifetime? What happens to our blind spots, the masks we never recognize and remove? What about the areas of hypocrisy that we never allow to be fully evicted? What happens in the hereafter to our masks? Are we, along with our masks, cast into the Lake of Fire to die the second death?

Or is there another solution? Can God in future ages somehow perform critical and extensive spiritual surgery on our souls? Can He burn off, cut out, and cast away all our sin-masks which, all too often, have rendered us lying letches, fearful followers, and doubting disciples?

When we are judged after we die, is it all or nothing? If in any area of our lives, we have never dealt with a particular mask, does that doom our entire spirit, soul, and body to eternal fire? What if we sanctified our souls to be "mask-less" at home, but still wore masks at work, or Church, or with certain friends, or on certain occasions? Is this the way an all-powerful God deals with His children? Or is there a better way? A more divine way? A more loving way?

Do any Scriptures point to these sin-masks being removed by God's judgment, WITHOUT the necessity of casting the entire person into the eternal flames as well? Oh yes! 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is quite clear:

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; EVERY MAN'S WORK shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be REVEALED BY FIRE; and THE FIRE SHALL

TRY EVERY MAN'S WORK, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS, BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE."

This passage above refers to the judgment of "Every man's work" (verse 13). The Revelation passage about the Lake of Fire in chapters 20-21 ALSO refers to the judgment of every man's works: "the dead were judged... according to their works" (Revelation 20:12). So, Paul and John were both describing the same event, the judgment of every man's works, but from their slightly different perspectives. Now, note what Paul says ultimately happens on the other side of every man's work being judged: "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ANY MAN'S WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS: BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE."

Do you see? The man himself shall be saved, yet he shall SUFFER LOSS, YET SO AS BY FIRE. But, WHAT EXACTLY is it that is "BURNED" off and in the process causes the man to "SUFFER" and experience "LOSS?" The answer is clear: THE MASKS ARE BURNED OFF AND AWAY FROM US! In this context, the "wood, hay and stubble" of 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 represents the various types of false masks we have co-created with Satan and worn as the primary motivating forces behind

our actions and works. Instead of performing "righteous works" that will endure, works of "gold, silver, and precious stones" (v. 12), works done under the Holy Spirit's leading and anointing (Romans 8:14), we have masked the real motives for our works with that which is from below and not above--- motives which are false, demonic, and self-centered.

Each and every wood-mask, hay-mask, and stubble-mask a man has wrongly allowed to be grafted onto his soul will have to be burned. The result is that he will experience the "wrenching and painful loss" of having huge parts of who he "thought" he really was throughout his entire life, completely burned away with white hot fire.

Like the most intense form of chemotherapy we know in the physical, yet multiplied a thousand times in painful intensity in the spiritual, every mask will be irradiated and destroyed with the fire of God. The man suffers a searing "identity crisis" which, though in the long term will bring great positive transformation, is in the short term painful beyond words. The length of time for the burning process may vary. "Wood" takes longer to burn than "hay" or "stubble," so wood masks are the most dangerous.

These false identities caused the man during his time on earth to operate outside his authentic self, and instead assume the sin-identity of a lust-mask, or a pride-mask, or a legalism-mask. The man may have grafted on a

"religious" mask and thereafter thought he was serving God, and that all his good works were in the service of the Lord, when in truth he was only serving his own self-righteousness (Matthew 7:22-23). Or, the man may have been serving his own fleshly desires while wearing a mask of "carnality." Finally, the man could just be wearing "the pride of life" mask, which prevented him from humbly submitting to the Lordship of the Spirit by operating in self-will.

Regardless, these masks "warp" the core motive of every man and cause them to be someone they are not, someone they were never created or called to be by God. To the extent these masks corrupt the purity of our identities in Christ, they MUST go.

So, how are they removed? In this lifetime, by sanctification, repentance, and the self-judgment that comes through prayer and communion. Paul said that if we judge ourselves NOW by removing every inner sin-mask, we will not be judged later. But, IF these sin-masks are still grafted onto our souls at the time of death, which means we never dealt with them fully during our lifetime, then the Lord deals with them at the judgment of every man's works, "yet so as by fire."

The Lord uses what the Church Fathers Clement and Origen called God's "WISE FIRE" to burn off and away all the false masks we have lived out of, the Satanic strongholds which have blinded, twisted, and deformed

us. The masks are the result of the MISUSE of our freedom, combined with the Devil's temptations and lies.

Seen from this angle, judgment is a good thing, not a fearful thing. The Greek word for "judge" means "to separate or put asunder." God "separates" our true self from all our false selves. He "tears asunder" the masks from our true identity. And then what becomes of all our masked identities? THEY ARE CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE, NEVER AGAIN TO BE PUT ON BY US OR ANYBODY ELSE!

This is a good thing, not a bad thing. I long for the day all my false selves (Richard the fearful, Richard the doubter, Richard the oppressed, Richard the lustful, Richard the liar) are FOREVER FAR REMOVED from my true self, my best self, my authentic self, my Christ self, my new man created in righteousness and true holiness.

God has a name for each one of us that only HE knows. This name is who we are called to be, who we WILL be for all eternity. These false selves CAN be burned off in THIS lifetime IF I submit myself fully to the Lord's sanctifying Spirit. But if my heart falls short, God is greater than my heart. He WILL see me delivered in the ages to come.

The great sculptor Michelangelo famously said, "The statue lies within the stone." He believed that all the sculptor does is chip away the exterior stone to reveal the interior truth. Or, put another way, the artist removes the

masked false in order to reveal the naked real. For us, we have the chance to use this life to chip away all our false masks with our Spirit-led chisel of faith. But to the extent we fail in this lifetime, God will use the righteous chisel Himself in the ages to come to perfect and reconcile all things to Himself. As the greatest artist of all, He will chip away the masked false to reveal the naked real.

It seems that God is all about name changes, or what I like to call mask-removal through name-renewal. On the positive side, the ugly mask known as Saul was burned off to reveal a mask-less Paul created in righteousness and true holiness. Likewise, in Genesis 17:5, Abram was de-masked to reveal Abraham, the father of many nations.

Revelation 2:17 tells us that God has given to each man who overcomes all worldly and demonic masks a white stone with a name on it, only the Lord knows. This name is our mask-less self, which ONLY the Lord can reveal to us. On the flip side, the angel Lucifer became the masked Satan. Satan, as a "mask," certainly the deadliest and densest mask of all, will definitely be cast forever into the Lake of Fire. But whether God will, at the end of all the ages, restore Lucifer back to his original God-created identity by wrenching away his devil mask is an open and intriguing question. Toward Satan, I have nothing but righteous hate and violent opposition on every level. But, towards the angel Lucifer who fell so very far, I must confess a stirring of pity.

Being a father of seven, I have often thought that if I were an all-powerful Father, I don't think I would ever give my children enough freedom to destroy themselves, not forever and ever and ever and ever.

I would certainly give them enough freedom to learn real gain and loss, the nature of love and the cost of evil, and the nature of faith and doubt. But I would never give them the keys to a car that could destroy them eternally.

I would give them a lot of elbow room to learn and grow, but I would not create an environment where they could destroy themselves for all time. And I don't think God does either. He might allow these masks of rebellion to deform us for a season, but it is hard to conceive that He would allow the masks to stay attached to us for an eternity in the Lake of Fire. On the contrary, I see Him using the Lake of Fire as the place where He separates from us all the enemies of our souls, and then destroys forever all the things that have harmed and deformed us.

Under this view, the Lake of Fire is not a torture chamber where anybody's essential self, spirit, or body is cast into flames for eternity. Rather, the Lake of Fire is God's final deliverance of those souls who "neglected their so great a salvation" by not taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. These souls have allowed "enemy grafting" to occur in their heartland. And now they are in the crisis of Hell because of it.

But God will not pull them by up their roots and destroy them totally. GOD WILL INSTEAD PRUNE BACK WHATEVER BRANCHES ARE NOT OF HIM. He will then hurl these branches into the Lake of Fire. What will be left is a transformed man, a born-again man, a man with no mask. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 clearly envisions such a separation.

For Christians who win the crown of an overcomer, there is little, if any, wood, hay, and stubble to separate and burn by flame. However, for the lost, the burning will be intense, and they will lose much, but they themselves will be saved. The lost will have their part in the lake which burneth with fire, but their part will be their wood, hay, and stubble and not their "essential selves." Rev. 21:8.

PREMISE # 4: GOD OVERCOMES ALL EVIL ONLY ONE WAY-- WITH GOODNESS!

God's nature overcomes evil only one way-- with GOODNESS! Romans 12:21; Matt. 5:43-48. It simply could not be in His nature to eternally torture any of His children, no matter how prodigal they have become. God's goodness will ultimately, irresistibly, and totally overcome and reconcile all forms of evil.

As George MacDonald wrote, "Nothing is inexorable but love. . . .Love is one, and love is changeless. For love loves into purity. Love has ever in view the absolute loveliness of that which it beholds. . . .There is nothing eternal but that which loves and can be loved, and love

is ever climbing towards the consummation when such shall be the universe, imperishable, divine. Therefore, all that is not beautiful in the beloved, all that comes between and is not of love's kind, must be destroyed." George MacDonald: Scotland's Beloved Storyteller, by Michael Phillips, p. 201 (1987).

What then is Hell, where did it come from, and how are we delivered from it? William Law's answer is simply this:

"There is no Hell but where the heart of the creature is turned from God, nor any heaven but where the heart of the creature worketh with God....Purification therefore is the one thing necessary, and nothing will do instead of it. But man is not purified till every earthly, wrathful, sensual, selfish, partial, self-willing temper is taken from him. He is not dying to himself til he is dying to these tempers, and he is not alive in God til he is dead to them." Selected Writings of William Law, by William Law and Stephen Holohouse (1940).

Hell, then, is the heart turned from God, and Heaven is the heart turned toward God. The crisis of Hell is God's "emergency rescue" of lost souls from their self-made and

Satan-generated Hell, which has hardened their hearts toward God.

But, they may run, but they can't hide in Hell. God will go after and save them from themselves. It will be painful

and agonizing, but it will ultimately lead to repentance, redemption, and life.

As the Theologia Germanica states, "Nothing burneth in Hell but self-will." This echoes William Law's statement, "Nothing separates us from God but our own self-will. Rather, our own self-will IS separation from God." George MacDonald famously said, "The one principle of Hell is, I am my own."

C. S. Lewis said, "Hell's gate is locked from the inside." But, praise God, Jesus has the keys to both death and Hell. He is truly the stronger one who enters Hell, binds Satan, and saves us from our own destruction (Matt. 12:28-29).

This is the HEROIC view of God, which is most consistent with His revealed nature in Jesus Christ. John A.T. Robinson summed it up best when he observed that the idea of God's deliverance from Hell for all men "comes from insight rather than foresight."

In other words, an insight INTO God's love makes the permanency of Hell impossible. It is not based on the foresight of what exactly Hell WILL be, but rather is based on an insight into what God's character IS as revealed in Jesus Christ. The early Church fathers had this insight, and so can we.

Chapter Ninety-Three

JURY NULLIFICATION

This is a term worth knowing— "jury nullification." It basically means a jury has the inherent power to nullify the legal guilt of any defendant when they sit in judgment.

Simply put, they don't have to convict, no matter how much the evidence points to the defendant's guilt.

Where I practice law, I have to argue this very carefully. While the jury has the inherent power to transcend the facts and find any defendant not guilty, lawyers are not allowed to DIRECTLY tell the jury they can. We can hint at it, but we can't specifically argue it.

The way I indirectly present it to the jury is to say that juries have what the law calls an "enlightened

conscience," which is one of the first terms we learned during law school. I tell them if their consciences are wavering and unsettled about finding my client guilty, they can and should follow their enlightened conscience. I tell them their hearts process facts along with their minds, and not to just rely on their intellect but their hearts and guts as well.

I believe this same dynamic applies to interpreting Scripture. We can nullify the dead letter of Scripture when our consciences cry out "NO!" Our consciences, as Origen said, are the divine chambers of justice which prompt the truths of God in their purest form.

I have been told on more than one occasion that I am teaching error because I say we should follow our Spirit-quickened consciences when reading Scriptures (not to mention following them as well when we do most anything else).

One person commented to me, "You lost me at saying we should follow our Spirit-quickened consciences." The person went on the say that only the Bible is authoritative and our consciences have nothing to do with determining the truth of it.

Can what this person said possibly be true?

Well, it makes some sense to first see what the Scriptures actually say about the human conscience. It's amazing that the literalist who corrected me by claiming that "only

the word of Scripture is to be used to determine truth" doesn't even know that the Bible repeatedly encourages us to use our human consciences to bear witness with the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit...." Romans 9:1

"For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience...." 2 Corinthians 1:12

Scriptures reveal that the conscience can be good in the sense of blameless, clear, clean, and pure (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Heb. 13:18; 1 Pet. 3:16, 21). The conscience can be cleansed, cleared, perfected, purified, washed, purged, and sprinkled clean (Heb. 9:9, 14; 10:22).

But, having a cleansed and purged conscience then allows us to do what? In other words, WHAT exactly IS the purpose of a clear conscience?

Here is an astounding truth. In the Old Testament imagery of the Temple, we find prophetic shadows of our "inner beings" under the New Covenant. The New Testament certainly exhorts us to penetrate and apply this symbolism to our lives today, here, and now. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" - 1 Corinthians 3:16.

Simply put, our conscience is our “inner high priest” which has been sprinkled and anointed by Christ to enter into His Holy of Holies, which resides deep within each of us.

It is with our consciences that we access, penetrate, exchange, and then express the Testimony of Christ. The conscience, then, is a crucial spiritual organ. God wants us to find our Spirit-quickened consciences when we read Scripture, not lose them.

Some people LOSE their sensitivity of conscience when reading the Bible. They deaden themselves to mercy, goodness, and love by embracing the "dead letter" reading of OT wrath, OT cruelty, and OT hostility. Paul warns us not to let this happen in 2 Corinthians 3.

Others FIND their consciences when reading the Bible. They instead deaden themselves to OT wrath, OT cruelty, and OT hostility by embracing Jesus' indwelling Spirit and personality as God's complete goodwill toward mankind.

In this challenging day of combative rhetoric and conflicting posturing, let’s find and follow our consciences to find the tender tone of Christ.

Chapter Ninety-Four

MOSES HAD ISSUES

I love and appreciate Moses. But Moses had serious issues. If we don't recognize his issues, we will likely duplicate them in ourselves. And that's the last thing God wants for us.

One issue was that Moses often inserted his own human anger on top of His image and understanding of the nature of God.

This caused Moses to project his own wrathful and thickly toned "anger accent" into his writings. And this anger accent was NOT God's anger. Not then and not now.

Simply put, Moses had a developmental limitation that hindered and, on occasion, distorted his perception of God.

Why? What was the issue here?

In Exodus 33:13-23, Moses sought to see God's "glory." God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock so that Moses could see His "goodness" from behind as it passed by.

This passage is important because it tells us: (1) God's glory is the same as God's goodness; (2) To see any aspect of God's goodness, we must be placed into the cleft of the Rock of Ages - - Jesus, i.e. only through the indwelling Christ can we perceive the true nature of God; and (3) Moses, as the finest example of Old Testament righteousness, could not see God's goodness from a full frontal view. This explains Jesus' explanation of what John Calvin called the Old Testament saints' "slight capacity" to understand the Spiritual truths of the New Testament.

Moses could not fit his mind and heart around the fullness of God's goodness. He filled in the gaps and blind spots with his own wrathful opinions and impatient spirit. Moses is certainly not the only one guilty of this. All Christians struggle with this same mistake. The difference is that New Testament believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit to help avoid repeating this mistake.

Makes you wonder how many other times what Moses shared as the word of God was partially tinged with his own wrath.

This sin can't be overemphasized, for it is what kept Moses OUT OF THE PROMISED LAND INHERITANCE. "And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, BECAUSE YOU BELIEVED ME NOT, TO SANCTIFY ME IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, therefore YOU SHALL NOT BRING THIS CONGREGATION INTO THE LAND WHICH I HAVE GIVEN THEM." Numbers 20:12.

Well, if we only see someone's character from behind and at an angled distance, it can be rightly questioned how well we really know that person.

Again, the problem with Moses is that he did not have a full frontal view of God's goodness, revealed only in Jesus Christ, so he could not process and manifest the true nature of God accurately and without distortion. Moses would often fill in the gaps of what he didn't know about God's nature with his own wrath and suppositions.

Moses lacked Christ's indwelling righteousness and thus lacked the developmental ability to perceive God in pure form. Moses may have been the best man in the land in his own righteousness, but that was still woefully inadequate to accurately carry and convey the righteousness which is of Jesus.

Again, Moses had a huge ANGER problem (Numbers 20:1-12; Exodus 2:11-14) which ultimately poisoned his ability to faithfully translate God's character to the people.

It was because of these distortions that Jesus normally referred to the Old Testament not as God's law or His Father's law. Instead, Jesus referred to it as Moses' law. ("Moses commanded" in Matt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk 5:14; Jn. 8:5; "Moses said" in Mk. 7:10; "Moses wrote" in Lk. 20:28; 24:44; "the law of Moses" in Jn. 1:17;7: 19, 23; Lk. 2:22; Mk. 12:26).

"For if that FIRST 'covenant' [Moses' Law] had been faultless (literally "without FLAW"), then would no place have been sought for a SECOND [Christ's New Covenant love]." Hebrews 8:7.

Jesus didn't normally attribute Moses' law as being said directly by God. Perhaps he meant that Moses and the other Old Testament saints heard God the best they could in their own righteousness, but their limitations resulted in them "stating" incomplete, shallow, and even distorted versions of God's pure word. The Apostle Paul called the Old Testament law "the ministration of death" because the letter of the law kills. 2 Cor. 3:6-7.

The letter kills because it is infected with wrong thinking about God. It pollutes our true Godly inspiration with our own anger, impatience, violence, and wrath. God gives a divine word, but we can then mutate it into an ungodly sentence. Or, God may give us a divine sentence, but we

can then deform it into an unrighteous paragraph. Or, God may give us a divine paragraph, but we can corrupt it into a warped chapter.

This is why we must let God's Spirit "de-husk " the literal shells or kernels off of Scriptures when they contradict God's nature so that we may eat the pure Spiritual fruit and true essence of it.

Moses' problem was just this - though he was inspired by God as no other man had ever been, he still occasionally corrupted, husked, warped, and distorted that inspiration with his own anger, violence, and impatience. That was Moses' problem. That is our problem.

Only Jesus walked distortion-free. He never added His own wrath to the Father's indwelling inspiration. Jesus only spoke what He heard from the Father and only did what He saw the Father do. Jn. 5:19,30.

This is why Jesus "was counted worthy of more glory than Moses" (Heb. 3:3), because Jesus never misrepresented or warped the true image of the Father.

Although God frequently spoke to Moses and inspired him to such an extent that his skin shone with God's glory, Moses could not retain that inspiration, so the glory always faded. Moses wore a veil on his face so that the people would NOT see the glory fade away. 2 Cor. 3:13. In other words, the people assumed Moses had the glory shining in his words, which he did not in fact have. And

Moses let them believe that he did. The veil misled the people.

In other words, as Moses' own wrath, violence, and impatience began to husk over the glorious inspiration of God, the people would not know that the glory had faded because of Moses' mask. The result is that the people had no discernment as to when Moses was manifesting God's glorious thoughts versus when Moses was projecting his own fleshly opinions onto his image of God. The people didn't know where God's inspiration ended and Moses' opinions began.

Or, perhaps stated better, the people didn't perceive how thickly Moses husked and encased God's inspiration with his own flawed flesh.

The perfect example of this dynamic occurs in Numbers 20:6-12. Here, when the grumbling Israelites were dying of thirst and hunger, God commanded Moses to speak to the rock so that water could gush forth and His people would know that He loved and cared for them. Moses, who had a continual problem with anger, allowed that anger to distort the image of God that he was portraying.

Instead of speaking to the rock as commanded, Moses struck the rock in anger with his staff while simultaneously cursing the people with his own wrath. The rock did, in fact, gush forth water, but due to Moses' misrepresentation of God's tone, the people thought that God was disgusted and angry with them.

Moses did an evil thing, but projected it onto God as a good thing. This sin, in fact, is what kept Moses out of the Promised Land, his failure to sanctify the name and nature of the Lord. It's the same sin that keeps us out of the Promised Land - misunderstanding and misrepresenting God's good nature.

Again and again, we see Moses' limitations in accurately beholding and conveying the Lord's true nature.

A New Testament example of this same wrong dynamic occurs in James' and John's conversation with Jesus after the Samaritans refused to receive them into their village. Lk. 9:51-56. James and John asked Jesus if they should call down fire on the Samaritans as the prophet Elijah did.

Jesus' answer was truly stunning. He told them that they knew not "what manner of spirit" they were "of," for He had come to "save" men, not to "destroy" them. James and John were willing to call their own evil wrath and murderous intent "good" and thereby misrepresent the character of Jesus. In other words, they struck the rock just as Moses did, and consequently maligned the character of God whose name they were invoking.

Until we are fully persuaded of God's goodness, we too are unable to know what spirit we are "of." This uncertainty causes schizophrenic beliefs about God, which enable and empower our wrath, violence, and revenge.

Considering modern-day examples, I was watching a documentary the other day on the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers. It included the interview of a father who had lost his son when the second tower fell. His son had been a fireman, and his death had devastated him. The Father initially said "God took his son away" and that he had come to accept his death as God's loving will, for which he now "thanked" God. Just a few seconds later, he railed that the terrorists had to pay for the evil that they had done by being wiped out, killed, and destroyed. I was stunned in sympathy for this man, but was astounded at the double-mindedness of his position. He accepted the taking of his son's life as God's will, but then wanted violent revenge against the terrorists who did the actual killing.

The examples go on and on. People, on the one hand, give God the credit for their paralysis, sickness, misfortune, and devastated state. Yet, within their hearts, they harbor venomous resentment towards the direct causes of their condition. I will grant that even some have become so convinced that God brought the misfortune that they have, in fact, stopped resenting anything and have fully accepted God's mysterious will. Though certainly well-intended, integrity compels us to ask if this is the right view of God.

We must listen to Jesus, NOT Moses. "And , behold , there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him . Then answered Peter , and said unto Jesus , Lord

, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt , let us make here three tabernacles ; one for thee , and one for Moses , and one for Elias . While he yet spake , behold , a bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold a voice out of the cloud , which said , This is my beloved Son , in whom I am well pleased ; HEAR HIM." Matthew 17:3-5.

In other words, we don't listen to Moses or Elijah--- we listen to Jesus!

Consider the following amazing statements about Moses' Law: "by Jesus everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses." Acts 13:39.

"the law is not of faith..." Galatians 3:12

"The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." 1 Corinthians 15:56

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse..." Galatians 3:10

"Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law..." Galatians 3:13

"That no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for the just shall live by faith." Galatians 3:11

"the law works wrath..." Romans 4:15

These verses show that Moses' law had the same problem Moses did---ANGER. The law works wrath. Wrath works hatred. Hatred works cursing. Cursing brings all forms of sin and death.

Had Moses properly translated the law in tone and spirit, without wrath, in other words, do you know what would have been written on those tablets Moses came down the mountain holding in both arms?

Two words---JESUS CHRIST! Jesus is the pitch-perfect tone and spirit of the law. Jesus fulfills the law as the pure manifestation of it. Moses' law is not the LOGOS of God. Jesus is the LOGOS. Moses' law is a distorted translation of Jesus Christ, distorted by Moses' unholy anger and partial misbelief.

Moses' law produces Moses' mountain described in Hebrews 13 above. It is a dark place where wrath and fear rule. God's image is so distorted here that He seems monstrous and bipolar, saving men one moment, only to kill them the next.

This so pervaded the Old Testament that they actually believed they would die if they saw God face to face. They thought they must be super-sanctified BEFORE they were worthy to see God. Sounds pious until the silliness of this thought sinks in.

Love doesn't look like Moses.

Love looks like Jesus.

Chapter Ninety-Five

An Undifferentiated View Of God And Satan

Chapter Ninety-Six

The gates of Hell will not prevail against it

"I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it."-- Jesus in Matthew 16:18.

Below are six short allegorical possibilities that we can apply to better understand the nature of God's judgment and the nature of "the gates of Hell."

1)JONAH AND THE WHALE: Jonah in the belly of a whale (Jonah 2:1-10) was used by Jesus as a type and shadow of being in Hell for three days. Matt. 12: 39-40. Jonah believed he had been in the belly "forever" (v. 6) when in fact it had only been three days. Jonah, in fact, called the whale's belly the "belly of Hell" (v. 2). Thus, Jesus and Jonah both referred to it as a type of Hell,

yet it was not in fact eternal. From Jonah's viewpoint, it certainly seemed eternal and hopeless, yet God was working repentance in Jonah's heart during these three days in Hell. For Jesus, it was different. Even though he suffered infinitely intense torment over His three days in Hell, He was aware of something the hopeless Jonah did not have the faith to know: "Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in Hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Acts 2:26-27. Verses 29-31 confirm that the above-quoted passage is referring to Jesus' confidence during His worst moments in Hell that the Father would not abandon Him. Perhaps this is why Jesus holds the "keys to Hell and death" (Rev. 1:18). The key out of Hell is the hope that God could never abandon His children to eternal torment. Jonah thought God would abandon him forever. Abraham thought God would abandon the rich man to eternal damnation in Luke 16:19-31. I much prefer Jesus' hopeful attitude to their hopeless one.

2)THE JUDGMENT OF NINEVEH: Saint Jerome (347-420) said, "I know that MOST persons understand the story of Nineveh and its king, the ultimate forgiveness of the devil and all rational creatures." Homily on Jonah. Here is a great Old Testament passage displaying the Lord's tender posture toward all creation. In response to Jonah's bloodthirsty desire to have Nineveh incinerated by judgment, God contrarily responded, "And should I

not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:10-11). This reminds me of something in the New Testament. "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do." Luke 23:34. What we glean from these passages is a very simple truth about how God views sinners-- they don't know their right hand from their left, they don't know what they are doing. So we should stop viewing them as those who DO.

3)THE GOOD SHEPHERD: Jesus, as the good shepherd, leaves the ninety-nine found sheep to find the lost one. It is hard to believe that the good shepherd goes to all the trouble to rescue the lost sheep, only to then torture them for eternity. "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Luke 15:4-5. This beautiful parable tells us how relentless and indefatigable the Lord is in seeking our rescue. If we extend this attitude to the postmortem realm, it's an easy reach to see God's wrath as restorative and His judgment as curative.

4)JUBILEE: Jubilee in the Bible (Leviticus 25:9-10) was a festival held every 50 years where all debts were forgiven, all slaves set free, all property returned, and all who had fallen were restored---- NO EXCEPTIONS! Makes me wonder what these points to in the New Testament.

This wasn't initiated by corporate repentance but by a divine decree of mercy. The Jews could have ignored the decree and continued to hold each other eternally in debt-bondage, but they chose instead to accept, publish, and perform the Lord's grace. So should we.

5)BANISHMENT: "Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him." 2 Sam 14:14. Amazing verse. It reveals God's will is that we not die or suffer banishment. He is perpetually DEVISING ways for us to recognize and realize His restorative power. This is the essential heart of "the good shepherd," which leaves the flock of ninety-nine to rescue and restore one lost sheep. Abandoning exiles is simply incompatible with the revealed nature of Jesus.

6)SAMSON AND THE GAZA GATES: Samson is a wonderful Old Testament allegory that prophetically speaks of the New Testament Jesus. Both Samson's and Jesus' births were announced prophetically by angels as soon-to-be deliverers of their people. Judges 13:6; Luke 1:30-33. Samson's exploits started the full deliverance from Philistine oppression. Judges 13:5. Jesus' exploits started the full and final deliverance of the children of humans from Satanic oppression. Genesis 3:15; Luke 2:30-40; Luke 4:18-19; 1 John 3:8. Samson displayed supernatural strength throughout his life by being a one-man wrecking machine, "stripping and spoiling" the

Philistine powers of their coverings. Judges 14:19. Christ displayed Samson's same supernatural strength when He singlehandedly "stripped and spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Col. 2:15. The original words in this passage, Greek scholars tell us, describe a triumphant military ceremony portraying Jesus as "stripping" all the demonic powers of their armor and then having a victory parade showing off the spoils. This victory saw Jesus ascending out of Hell, "leading captivity captive." Eph. 4:8-10; Matt. 16:18. Samson tore the hinges off the gates of Gaza and carried them away on his shoulders. Jdg. 16:3. Jesus tore the hinges off the enemy gates of Hades, then carried them away and discarded them at the foot of the cross; these gates were nevermore able to lock anybody away from God's love again. Matthew 16:18; Revelation 1:18.

CONCLUSION: So, after considering the above, why would we EVER limit God's ability to rescue exiles ONLY on THIS side of death? Restoration of those in exile is an essential quality of the divine nature. Some claim Hell to be the "ultimate exile," so why would God not perpetually devise ways for the "ultimate restoration?" After all, Jesus said the gates of Hell/Hades would not prevail against His church. This implies the gates of Hell will come off so that ALL its prisoners will be set free so that Christ may be "all-in-all"(1 Corinthians 15:28) and that He will "fill all things" (Ephesians 4:10).

Chapter Ninety-Seven

Ananias and Sapphira.

CSI Jerusalem: Who Murdered Ananias and Sapphira?

Did the Holy Spirit kill Ananias and Sapphira as many claim (Acts 5:1-11)? Well, the passage doesn't even "literally" say that God killed them, so we have to look closer at the passage's subtext to do a fair CSI investigation as to the true cause of their deaths.

Peter asked Sapphira in the literal Greek of verse 9, "Why did the two of you agree to pressure the Spirit?" (Word Study Greek-English New Testament, Paul R. McReynolds, Tyndall, pp. 441 (1999). In other words, why did you two push away the protective presence of God?

The implication is clear, then, that Satan, regardless of whether we see the Devil as a dark angel OR as a dark energy working within the corporate human psyche, is the causative culprit here, not God.

Satan "filled their hearts" to lie, then Ananias and Sapphira quenched away God's protective presence with their sin, then Satan filled the vacuum in their hearts with oppressive condemnation, and they both died.

McReynolds' interlinear translation of 1 Corinthians 10:9 describes this same dynamic. "But not we might PRESSURE OUT the Christ, just as some of them PRESSURED and by the snakes were destroyed." Interlinear translations can be a little awkward to our ear, but they often give us the gold of better understanding Scripture texts.

Ananias and Sapphira's rampant neglect and disbelief toward God, combined with their fear toward their circumstances, all combined to do the following. THEY PRESSURED OUT THE PROTECTIVE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND WERE DESTROYED BY SATAN. And just how did Satan kill them? Below, we will see that Satan used the usual weapons-- fear and condemnation-- to kill these two pathetic people.

But, how do we know God didn't kill them? Because Hebrews 2:14-15 says Satan has had the power of death, not God. John 10:10 says Satan kills men, not God. 1

Corinthians 5:5 says Satan destroys the flesh of men, not God.

And, actually, the passage doesn't say anybody actually killed them, but they themselves "gave up the ghost" (spirit) AFTER hearing Peter's words of condemnation. It may well be that they feared Peter's words so much that they just surrendered their will to live.

We all know, or have heard of, people who give up on life in despair, some gradually, others in an instant in time. Some "give up their spirit" because of a broken heart, or impending sickness, or disaster. Perhaps they were so worried about their sin because it was one of the first of the church age, and they thought it was perhaps unforgivable.

In other words, it appears Annanias and Sapphira were condemned to death. But was this God's will? Was it God's best? Did Peter show them the same grace he himself received when he betrayed the Lord three times in one night? What if somebody in apostolic authority, James or John, for instance, told Peter to essentially "drop dead" in the wake of his sin, might he also have given up the ghost?

Did Peter extend God's grace to them to NOT hold this sin to their account, as Jesus did, as the martyr Stephen did, or did he even try to minister repentance to them, to counsel them, to pray for them, to intercede for them, to lay hands on them to be forgiven and healed, or any

of the other things Scripture and later Church practice advised?

What about this passage? "Brethren , if a person be overtaken in a fault , you which are spiritual , restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering yourself , lest you also be tempted ." Galatians 6:1.

Why, in Jesus' name, was the space to repent NOT offered to Ananias and Sapphira in this situation by Peter?

Matthew 18:15-17 instructs us how to FIRST go privately to one caught up in a trespass, THEN to go with other witnesses if the person does not receive the private correction, and only THEN to bring public confrontation if the person remains unrepentant. And even then, the worst punishment is excommunication, NOT murder.

God's way is to confront a sin WITH the goal of restoration and repentance of the sinner, NOT summary execution. Why wasn't this gracious dynamic followed?

Was the spirit of these merciful passages just cited above followed by Peter? No, Peter appeared to quickly and immediately condemn them, after which he basically just stepped out of the way and let the Devil have them.

If lying to the Holy Spirit by holding back some of our resources REALLY mandated immediate Holy Spirit execution, then how many of us would still be standing?

How many of us would not have been executed long ago? Perhaps the moral of this passage is more about Peter's mercy-deficit than it is about Annaias and Sapphira's faith-deficit.

Peter was not perfect. He had a well-known quick trigger when it came to anger or frustration. He was quick to use the physical sword to cut an ear off an approaching soldier. He was also quick to use the verbal sword, such as when he told Simon the sorcerer to perish on the spot along with his money. Perhaps, Peter was also quick here to likewise thrust a murderous impulse here to Ananias and Sapphira.

If Paul had the guts to "withstand Peter to his face" (Galatians 2:11) for possible spiritual error, shouldn't we, too, have the guts if, of course, the Holy Spirit so leads?

But, didn't great fear come on the Church in the wake of these deaths? It can be argued that the "great fear" that came on the Church in the wake of this event, and the subsequent healing of the sick from Peter's shadow, came more from men wrongly, excessively, and fearfully elevating Peter rather than through the exercising of pure faith in Christ.

If we, as part of a young and inexperienced church body, saw a revered leader such as Peter appear to instill such fear that people dropped dead, literally scared and condemned to death, then we too might start to idolize his "shadow." His presence, word, and opinion might

supplant or displace our faith in Jesus. We might turn Peter into an earthly Pope, kiss his ring, worship his shadow, etc. If people got legitimately healed from Peter's ministry, it was despite Peter's anger, not because of it.

And here is another thought. Suppose the common interpretation is correct that God had Peter denounce Ananias and Sapphira to death for withholding truth and resources from the Holy Spirit. In that case, Church history should be full of famous Christians who likewise verbally struck down and assassinated all the millions upon millions who have, at one time or another, withheld truth or resources from God ever since Ananias and Saphira. In fact, we should still be seeing people regularly executed as a normal part of Church meetings and discipline.

But that is not the case.

So, again, when Peter appears a little too quick on the trigger to tell people to "drop dead" for their transgressions (Sapphira and Simon in Acts 5 and 8, should we be willing to withstand his actions if our conscience compels us?

Do we follow the Holy Spirit or Peter? Jesus or Peter? I honestly can't see Jesus telling anybody to drop dead on the spot. That ain't the way He rolled— ever. Jesus might rattle their religious cage, but He never cursed someone to die on the spot. Be merciful seven times seventy, overcome evil with good, bless your enemy, and

pray for them that despitefully use you. I don't see "curse them to die or perish on the spot" on that list in Matthew 5:38-48.

And don't get me wrong, I love Peter, but are we to assume he was flawless in his every dealing? Paul sure didn't.

None of us is yet flawless in ministering the mercies of God. After telling Simon to "perish" along with his money, Simon asks Peter to pray for him that the things Peter spoke not happen to him. But Scripture is silent as to whether Peter then prayed for him. I sure hope he did. I would definitely withstand Peter to his face if he didn't on that issue. Jesus is our model, not Peter.

These are all questions the Holy Spirit wants to minister to us. Understandably, the infant Church might have less tolerance and patience than a more mature and experienced group of believers. I know when I was newly converted and freshly fervent in the Spirit, my tolerance level for others' unbelief was small. I would have been just as firm and ferocious as Peter. But, with time and maturity, and after suffering through many of my own grievous failures, my patience for people's shortcomings, sins, and failures has exponentially increased. I am not nearly as quick to pull the condemnation trigger as I used to be.

Paul had the courage to "withstand Peter to his face" when Peter was wrong (Galatians 2:11). Perhaps WE

should "withstand Peter to his face" in this passage as well. But regardless, one thing is certain. God did not kill Ananias and Sapphira. Satan did. Satan was certainly working lies and crippling condemnation in their hearts, and possibly in the hardening of Peter's heart toward them as well, which kept him from ministering protective mercy. But, Satan was the true behind-the-scenes assassin here any way you look at it.

Chapter Ninety-Eight

The Flood, caused by God or Satan?

(December 19, 2013)

Did Jesus drown all the children in the world?

If you believe the Old Testament is to be read "by the letter" at all times, and that each Old Testament Scripture carries the exact same weight and depth of understanding as any and all New Testament Scripture, then you are forced to believe the following. Jesus killed a world full of children in the Old Testament. Jesus killed a nation full of Egyptian firstborn infants and children. Jesus killed a huge city full of children of all ages in Sodom and Gomorrah, not to mention all the other children

killed in the various Biblical bloodbaths, including even Israelite children under God's killing wrath.

Many would call all these infanticides judgment by a "holy God who cannot allow sin to go unpunished." But that image hardly fits in with the Jesus the Holy Ghost now reveals, the same Jesus who loved and protected children so. And, as is commonly said, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Jesus saves children, He doesn't drown them, burn them, stone them, or smash their heads against rocks as described in the Old Testament. He is the same forever on this point.

Some would claim that the Old Testament passages I am citing are somehow being taken out of context. No, they are not. God clearly killed them all, at least if you read it according to "the letter of Scripture." However, when we read by "the Spirit of Scripture," as Jesus did, and as Paul did when he allegorized numerous Old Testament passages to mean something other than just what they "literally" said, we see something else altogether.

Jesus came in the New Testament to reveal that Satan was NOT God's left hand of destructive wrath. Satan was a cosmic rebel who opposed God's will on every level, and in whose power the whole fallen world lies. 1 John 5:19. Satan was the Old Testament dispenser of death, not God. Hebrews 2:14. Judaism has always considered Satan to be the death angel. Jesus revealed that the destructive works

the Old Testament attributed to God were, in reality, the destructions of Satan.

Judaism sees Satan as a friend to God, not an enemy. Do you think Satan was just twiddling his thumbs in the Old Testament while God did all his dirty work? Jesus laid it out for us in no uncertain terms. Stealing, killing, and destroying are of the devil, not of God. John 10:10. Satan was the liar and murderer from the beginning, not God. John 8:44. Jesus came to expose Satan's methods, not adopt them. He came to destroy the works of Satan altogether. 1 John 3:8.

So, did God intentionally drown millions of children, women, and men in Noah's day? No! Not then, not now, not ever. Then why does the Old Testament appear to say that He did?

Simply put, the Old Testament was written from a perspective that saw Satan as an obedient angel of God with a tough job, but who ultimately was just following the Lord's orders. Jesus, in contrast, revealed in His teachings and tone that Satan was violently OPPOSED to His Father's will, RATHER than humbly submitted to it.

Read most any Jewish religious reference material on Satan, and you will see they believe that Satan was the death angel who smote all the Egyptian firstborn, supposedly at the Lord's command. And not just the Egyptians. Jews still believe that Satan is the Grim Reaper

who ultimately kills all men at God's sole command. The book of Job shows Satan kills with sickness ("boils"), with nature ("a great wind"), with other violent men ("Sabeans with swords"), and with supernatural power ("fire from heaven"). Satan is a master assassin who kills a million different ways, but always, the Jews believe, at the express command of God.

As THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH CONCEPTS by Philip Birnbaum says, "Satan...is...identified with the ANGEL OF DEATH. He leads astray, then he brings accusations against man, whom he slays eventually. His chief functions are those of temptation, accusation and punishment. Under the control of God, he acts solely with the divine permission to carry out his plots." (Sanhedrin Press, page 594). Rabbi Benjamin Blech similarly writes, "Judaism sees Satan as a servant of God whose function is to set up choices between good and evil so that we can exercise our free will.... [His] apparent harshness is merely camouflage for divine concern and love." IF GOD IS SO GOOD, WHY IS THE WORLD SO BAD? Simcha Press, pages 7-9.

So, the culprit in the worldwide flood is, according to Jewish thought, Satan. And they are RIGHT about THAT----- Satan's fingerprints are the ONLY ones found on the Genesis flood. But what the Jews, both ancient and modern, are WRONG about is their belief that Satan is an obedient angel merely doing what God expressly tells him to do.

In the New Testament, we get a significantly different picture. While Hebrews 2:14-15 confirms that Satan, as "the devil," does indeed have "the power of death," Jesus' purpose in bearing the cross was to "deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Put even more bluntly in this passage, Jesus ascended the cross in order to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Jesus came to destroy the works of the destroyer. 1 John 3:8. But Jesus destroyed them not with His "alleged" counter-wrath, but with His sacrificial love. Jesus came to reveal that all forms of "death" and "violence" were enemies of God and never a part of His divine nature. 1 Corinthians 15:25-28 defines the dynamic of "death" as an "enemy" of God to be "put under His feet" until it's "destroyed."

So, suppose the Old Testament saints were confused and not able to differentiate the purposes of Satan and God. What does this imply about their ability to distinguish between the voices of God and the devil? Well, it allows for the absolute mother of all mistaken identities---confusing the voices of God and Satan--- or, just as tragic, mistakenly combining their TWO voices into ONE bipolar voice.

Like a high static radio, which sometimes receives two different signals at once, the Old Testament saints were hearing from both Yahweh and Satan, sometimes

alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously. Without the indwelling Holy Spirit, they could not distinguish between the two voices, again just like a radio receiving two different stations, although the dial is only on one setting. The Old Testament saints assumed both voices were from God, that both WERE God.

But Jesus came to correct all misunderstandings about His Father. We have the anointing BECAUSE of Jesus to go back and properly divide Scripture, just like He did in Matthew 5:38-48. Jesus came to reveal His Father's light and Satan's darkness, something the Old Testament saints were clueless about. John 1:18.

So, in regard to the flood, what role did Satan play, and what role did God play? Satan did the killing-- all of it. Why do we know this? Hebrews 2:14-15 says Satan has "the power of death," not God. God is not a killer-- period. He could not have sent the flood because the New Testament says He doesn't kill. But, Satan sure does. And I'm sure we agree that Satan was not off somewhere twiddling his thumbs in the Old Testament while God was wiping out the whole earth's population, save one family. If God is the killer of evil men, who needs Satan? Jesus called Satan the "murderer from the beginning," not His heavenly Father.

Yet, what exact role did God play in the process?

I believe the event transpired as follows: Men continually sowed wickedness in the earth until their thoughts and

imaginations were purely evil (Gen. 6:5). God foreknew their expanding unbelief and that Satan would have greater and greater access to afflict and destroy all evil men in 120 years. This was because they were continually quenching and "pressuring away" the Lord's protective Spirit by increasingly giving their hearts over to the devil (Gen. 6:3).

God warned His righteous Noah to build a protective Ark for Noah and his family to avoid the Satanic wrath to come. (Gen. 6:8-22). Satan continued to "accuse" God that He should repent of ever making mankind and that they had to be wiped out (Gen. 6:6-7). God responded that His righteous Noah would not fail and that his righteous seed would be preserved (Gen. 6:8). Satan released his killer flood, and the wicked perished (Gen. 7:10-24). God's protective Spirit contracted down to the size of Noah's ark and brought them through the flood and blessed Noah and his sons and said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." (Gen. 9:1).

I freely admit to excavating, renovating, and elevating Moses's version of the flood to comply with the New Testament understanding of God's role in the world. This is the only reading that keeps God from being clearly guilty of death, disaster, and destruction. I don't believe the New Testament teaches that God directly causes natural disasters. Satan causes such events through the access given to him by men's sinful sowing. The

unbelief of men eventually quenches God's protective Spirit. God's protective hedge constricts and constricts and constricts until the freewill of the men involved finally gets their way in turning themselves over to Satan's wrath. Then God is forced to withdraw, and Satan is allowed space to execute his wrath through the curses of the law, a wrath which Revelation 12:12 says is "great upon the earth."

Some may say that 2 Peter 2:4-10 suggests that the New Testament confirms that God brought the flood of Noah on the world of the ungodly. However, in consulting two different interlinear Bibles, one by Paul McReynolds and the other by Jay P. Green, the passage is found to literally say that "the flood the world of irreverent ones having brought on."

In other words, this passage says that the flood was brought on by the sowing of wicked men. Men continually sowed the sin, thereby progressively quenching away and constricting God's protective Spirit over the next one hundred and twenty years. Satan ultimately brought the full harvest of destruction, but God continued to protect righteous Noah.

Whenever the Old Testament literally, "by the dead letter," in other words, contradicts the New Testament image of God revealed by Jesus Christ, we are compelled and authorized to excavate, renovate, and elevate its meaning to align with New Covenant truth. Jesus

repeatedly did this exact thing, not only in Matthew 5, the sermon on the mount, but also in such passages as Luke 4:18-20, where Jesus edits the phrase "to declare the vengeance of our God" out of the Isaiah 61:1-2 passage He was quoting to declare the purpose of His ministry. He purged the wrath out of the passage, in other words.

Our challenge is to stop reading the Bible just by context, and instead read it by the Holy Spirit's subtext. I believe 2 Corinthians 3 commissions us to do this very thing.

"And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us ABLE MINISTERS of the new covenant, NOT 'of' the LETTER but 'of' the Spirit; for THE LETTER KILLS, but THE SPIRIT GIVES LIFE." 2 Corinthians 3:4-6.

Jesus is not a child-killer!

A child-thriller, yes!

A child-healer, yes!

But never a child-killer!

Chapter Ninety-Nine

Read Noah's flood Christologically.

Today, the flood of Noah is better dealt with on its allegorical level rather than on its literal level. 1 Peter 3:20-21, in fact, calls it a "soul-saving" event, which is a "figure" of "baptism" for us.

So, on an allegorical level, the deliverance of Noah's family from a corrupted world, by means of "water," allegorizes our salvation, through baptism, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (1 Peter 3:20-21; Colossians 1:13).

I believe the hermeneutical key to rightly interpreting Genesis' events lies in our letting Jesus' Spirit interpret it

for us Christologically/allegorically, just as He did for the Emmaus disciples in Luke 24.

All the Old Testament is primarily to be read as an allegorical PROPHECY of the coming life, deity, nature, character, sacrifice, death, resurrection, and victorious glorification of Jesus. But the allegory doesn't stop there. The Old Testament also prophesies of the ascended Jesus' eventual INDWELLING of all of us through the Pentecostal outpouring of His Spirit.

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself....And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight....They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?.... Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures”- Luke 24:27, 31-32, 44-45.

To read it allegorically is NOT to deny that it lacks any historical value at all. Rather, it is to say that the primary meaning of Old Testament Scripture is symbolic and non-literal. It is more like a heroic "movie trailer" of Christ and His "coming soon" kingdom. The trailer is not in narrative form, but is a series of quickly cut and

weaved symbolic snippets which give us exciting flashes of insight into Jesus. But his trailer can only be previewed on a Christological projector.

Now, we know that Jesus is LITERALLY nowhere explicitly to be found by name in the Old Testament. But, ALLEGORICALLY, He is everywhere to be found. So Jesus allegorized the Scriptures to these two highly blessed disciples. And their hearts burned within them as a result.

"Every man, within himself has Moses and the Israelites, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the Patriarchs and the kingdom of heaven and hell. Thus, the events described in the Bible, and looked upon by the pious as being things of a past history, are actually descriptions of internal processes taking place in the constitution of man himself". ~Jacob Boehme 1575-1624

God may flood away INTERNAL notions, but He would never flood away EXTERNAL nations. Not nations that have countless infants, toddlers, and children. It's not in God's nature to kill people who "don't know what they are doing." Jesus prayed for their forgiveness, not for their destruction. God may seek to slay unloving notions, but never unloving nations.

The Bible authors pervasively used a literary technique called "personification." The ancient writers personified most everything. Personification is the representation of an object, concept, trait, or quality AS IF it were

a person. Wicked nations become wicked notions. External giants become internal strongholds of fear. Wisdom and foolishness, in the Book of Proverbs, are both personalized as a woman lifting up their voice in the street. Consider Paul's personification of sin ruling as a king in his body, and the "old man" and "new man" as personifications of two warring persons in the new creature after baptism.

So, keeping this personification technique in mind, the flood is spiritually understood as an external symbol, or "figure" as Peter called it, of an internal event. God, by His Holy Spirit, floods our inner being with cleansing and purging energies, a flood of baptismal fire which burns and washes away evil notions, evil impulses, evil strongholds, evil images, evil desires, etc. Conversely, what gets saved is our core soul, that part of us which desires God. Jesus is the protective ark of our salvation, which carries us through this sanctifying flood and lands us on dry land to begin our spiritual lives anew in a re-created inner world.

HOWEVER, if we read the flood as a literal event rather than as an allegory, then Satan was the killer. He always has been. Jesus said in John 8:44 that he was a murderer from the beginning of Adam's creation. Hebrews 2:14-15.

Here is how that would work based on the upgraded teachings of the upgraded New Testament.

Noah's flood as a literal event.

Did God flood the Old Testament world, or was it Satan?

Chapter One Hundred

The Bible points to Jesus. It serves Him, not vice versa.

Is there a difference between:

—the Scriptures inspired by God,

—the Logos-Word of God, and

—the Rhema-Word of God?

There is frequent confusion and commingling of these three vital, but very distinct, New Testament terms. This confusion often ends up causing many to slip into Bibolatry, the wrongful worship of the Bible.

This short study will help distinguish the various uses in the Bible of these three crucial terms.

When the New Testament refers to the Bible as a whole, it uses the word "Scriptures," which is the Greek word "Graphe." Jesus continually referred to the entirety of the Old Testament Bible as "the Scriptures." This included the Law, the Prophets, and the wisdom Writings, all of which formed the Bible as it then existed in Jesus' day. "You study the Scriptures (Graphe) thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me." John 5:39. (Also see Matthew 21:42, 22:29; Mark 14:49; 15:28; Luke 24:32, 45).

Now, when the New Testament uses the term "Rhema-Word," it refers to divinely inspired insights. It represents a divine devotional truth "quickened by" God and then "expressed through" the heart and mouth of man. "The Rhema-Word is near you, in your mouth, and in your heart : that is , the Rhema-Word of faith, which we preach." Romans 10:8. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word (rhemati) that proceeds from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4. (also Luke 4:4).

By contrast, when the New Testament refers to "THE (definite article) Word of God," it uses the Greek word "Logos," and always and only refers to Jesus' divine presence. The Greek word "Logos" in different contexts

can certainly be used in other ways, but "THE Logos of God" always refers to the Spirit of Christ.

Logos just means "the expressed essence" of something. Thus, Jesus is "the expressed essence" of the Father, the very projected image of the invisible God. Colossians 1:15-18.

"In the beginning was the word, and the Logos-Word was with God, and the Logos-Word WAS God.... And the Logos-Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory , the glory as of the only begotten of the Father ,) full of grace and truth." John 1:1, 14.

With me so far? The Logos-Word IS Jesus, or perhaps better put, "the Spirit of Jesus"-- the core essence of Jesus which later "BECAME flesh." Except for His brief 33-year incarnation, it is the non-bodily Spirit of Christ Who abided in the Old Testament (1 Peter 1:11) and Who now abides and resides upon the earth. The Spirit of Christ is the sole communicative agent of God, who is to lead us into all truth. John 16:13; Romans 8:14. The Spirit is now in the world speaking to all men's consciences according to their willingness and ability to receive His promptings.

Simply put, WITHOUT the Spirit of Christ doing the "quickening" within our minds and hearts, we don't have any truly transformative knowledge about God.

"But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed God`s Spirit dwell in you; but if any one has NOT [the] SPIRIT OF CHRIST he is NOT of Him." Romans 8:9.

Simply put, the Logos-Word is a "who," the Spirit of Christ internally engraved on our hearts, and NOT a "what," the dead letter engraved on external tablets.

Revelation picks up on this idea of Jesus as the Logos-Word. "And I saw heaven opened , and behold a white horse ; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True... His eyes were as a flame of fire , and on his head were many crowns... And He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood : and His NAME is called 'THE Logos-Word of God.'" Revelation 19:11-13.

Now, some maintain that the Logos-Word of God is defined as the Bible. But think about how that would ridiculously affect the meaning of the passages cited in John 1 and Revelation 19 above.

"In the beginning was the Bible, and the Bible was with God, and the Bible WAS God.... And the Bible was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld the Bible's glory , the glory as of the only begotten of the Father ,) full of grace and truth." John 1:1, 18.

"And I saw heaven opened , and behold a white horse ; and the Bible that sat upon him was called Faithful and True... The Bible's eyes were as a flame of fire , and on his head were many crowns... And The Bible was

clothed with a vesture dipped in blood : and His NAME is called 'THE Bible of God.'" Revelation 19:11-13.

Doesn't sound quite kosher, does it? Sadly, it is the ultimate objectification and depersonalization of God to label "a thing" (the Bible) as being synonymous with Jesus. And this very thing has resulted in a phenomenon known as Bibiloatry, the wrongful worship of the Bible. Many OT Jews fell into this same snare by wrongly worshipping the engraved stones of Moses, which contained the written Law. And Jesus called them out on it in John 5:39, quoted above.

The Jews often treated the written Scriptures as exactly as they would God. They literally enthroned it in their places of worship. They would actually bury and mourn a Torah scroll if it were desecrated. Jews would also dance with the Torah scroll in joyous celebration. They actually considered themselves married to the Scriptures. The Jews literally kissed the Scriptures daily in their synagogues and homes. They quite literally worshipped Scriptures AS God. Sadly, this just goes too far by turning God into a controllable object, an "it," rather than an uncontrollable Spirit, a "who."

And many Christians do the same thing today. They place more faith in what they call the literal "word of God," the Bible, than they do in the Holy Spirit of Christ, the actual Word of God. This is the very thing 2 Corinthians 3:6 warns us against, not to be a minister of

the dead external letter, but rather to be an able minister of the living internal Spirit of Christ.

Am I saying the Bible is bad or unnecessary? Emphatically NOT!! The Bible is blessed, wonderful, and crucial to our growing up and into Christ. I love and esteem its truth, beauty, and wisdom. I treasure its text, subtext, and super-text, which is pregnant with divine promises that provide us with all things, both natural and supernatural, for life and Godliness. 2 Peter 1:3-5.

Let me be clear. The Spirit of Christ wonderfully uses the Scripture as it uses no other human document in history. But, then again, Satan misuses the Scriptures more than any other document in human history. And he does it by snaring readers into a literalistic dead letter reading, which mutates the image of God into a bipolar monster. The value of Scripture depends on which Spirit is translating it, Christ's or Satan's. When Satan is leading us to read the Bible as a wrathful threat, we are crippled with fear and despair toward God. But, when Christ is actively illuminating our minds, all is well, and we see the Bible for what it is-- a treasure box of promises.

But as much as I love Scripture, I do not worship it. I worship God THROUGH it, but only as an "instrument" for the Spirit of Christ to blow revelation and inspiration through.

So, to review, the Greek "Graphe" refers to the entire Canon of "written Scriptures," the Bible, in other

words. The Greek "Rhema" refers to any individual and devotionally inspired idea, insight, or idiom from the Lord. The Scriptures ("Graphe") are comprised of individual Rhema-Words of divine inspiration.

But, "THE Logos-Word of God" ALWAYS refers to a "who" rather than a "what." THE Logos-Word IS Jesus, always Jesus, only Jesus. THE Logos-Word is NOT the written Bible, nor the inspired Rhema-Words which comprise the written Bible.

Rather, the Logos-Word is Jesus-- His kingdom presence within us, and His kingdom presence around us. Moses once gloriously declared that he and the Israelites would not make a move toward their destiny unless the Lord's presence went with them. Moses here spoke of THE Logos-Word, the Spirit of Christ, and NOT the Scriptures.

When the New Testament says to "preach the Word of God," it is not saying to preach the Bible, but rather to preach Jesus, His kingdom, His presence, and His Spirit. Sure, we glean much of what we understand about Jesus from the Bible, but only up to a point. It is always toward the Spirit of Christ that all Scripture richly points. Scripture can supplement our sharing, but it is always to be the protean and palpable presence of God, WHOM we are to minister to others.

As for the Logos-Word in Hebrews 4:12, that is certainly referring to Jesus IN us, the hope of glory, Who divides

soul from Spirit, NOT the literal Bible. The very next verse, 13, uses "He" in a back-reference to "the Word." So, again, I think the Logos here is clearly a "who." The New Testament canon didn't even exist when the book of Hebrews was written. So "the Logos-Word of God" to the first-century audience would have meant "the Spirit of Christ" rather than the New Testament canon, which would not even come into existence for several more generations.

Until we realize this and intentionally move the Holy Bible in our understanding away from a synonymous and co-equal place with the Holy Spirit, we will be subject to snares of dead letter legalism and Biblioatry. I know people who are bloodthirsty for the Bible, yet have no confidence in the Holy Spirit's ability to ever powerfully lead them into deeper revelation and intimacy outside of the dead letter reading of the Bible.

The Bible points to Jesus. It serves Him, not vice versa.

So, I want to propose a RADICAL EXPERIMENT for the next 30 days.

Whenever you hear, say, or think the term "the word of God," replace the idea of this describing "the Bible" with the following concept-- "the Spirit of Christ."

For example, "I was richly in the word this morning" translates "I was richly in the Spirit of Christ this morning." Or, "The word of God is really speaking to

me" becomes "The Spirit of Christ is ...really speaking to me." Or, "The word of God leads, blesses, protects, heals and delivers me" becomes "The Spirit of Christ leads, blesses, protects, heals and delivers me." See if this does not make God more vibrantly real and near to you over the next month. Continue to read Scripture to your heart's desire, but just remember to prioritize the Spirit's place of prominence in the proper translation and illumination of what you read.

Chapter One Hundred One

What on earth is going on with Job?

What on earth is going on with Job? Did God just hand him over to Satan to be destroyed as part of some sort of cosmic bet?

Does God do the same with us, intentionally handing us over to Satan to be destroyed when Satan simply demands it?

My article below offers a proposed answer. Feel free to copy and read later, particularly since it is somewhat long.

THE PROBLEM WITH THE BOOK OF JOB: BEWARE THE "STROBE-EFFECT"

The JOB-EFFECT is a spiritual metaphor for the physical phenomenon known as the STROBE-EFFECT.

This latter term describes the disorienting effect from "snapshot" vision through the use of flickering lights or vibrating shutters. We have all experienced the choppy and confusing effects of moving through strobe-lighted areas, whether it be at a fair, dance, party, concert, or class demonstration.

Basically, we stop seeing reality in a smooth and continuous flow. Instead, we see reality solely in snapshots through alternating flashes of light and dark. We see briefly, then are blinded briefly ---- light, dark, light, dark, light, dark. We are left unbalanced, unsure, and confused. We see some things briefly, but we lose the visual feelings of momentum, flow, and movement. These isolated "snippets of seeing" leave us with sensations of disconnectedness. Isolation breeds isolation. Isolated perception results in isolated thinking, isolated feelings, and isolated being.

In the spiritual sense, there is a similar dynamic that confuses believers into low levels of faith, hope, and confidence toward God. They become tentative in their spiritual walk because for every INSIGHT OF LIGHT they receive toward God, it is quickly blotted over by an INSIGHT OF DARKNESS. They are left isolated and shrugging their shoulders about God's nature because they simply don't see God in a continuous stream of

light and love. Their image of God changes every other thought. God brings good, God brings evil. God heals me, God afflicts me. God is love, God is wrath. God protects me, God attacks me. The end result is a double-minded man who, as James 1:8 says, can receive nothing from God. This poor man becomes a spiritual petal-plucker who wastes his time alternatively lamenting and wondering about God, "He loves me, He loves me not."

This can be easily seen in the Psalms, where the frustrated David says in one verse that God has abandoned him, but then in the next verse that God's love is steadfast and never ending. Many of the Psalms read this way, not to mention many other Old Testament passages, which quickly alternate God's infinite love with God's infinite wrath.

But instead of calling the spiritual version of this dynamic the STROBE-EFFECT, I want to call it the JOB-EFFECT. This is because this way of double-minded thinking derives largely from the Book of Job, WHENEVER it is read without Holy Ghost illumination. Job is a wonderful book when it is read in a wonderful way. But when read with natural thinking, wrathful intent, and little faith, the book of Job MUTATES into a monstrous book which greatly deforms the image of God. I want to share some interpretive keys to Job, which will remove all "strobing" from our understanding of God's goodness.

KEY NUMBER ONE: JOB WAS CLUELESS ABOUT GOD'S TRUE NATURE. The Book of Job, at its root, is not about what we know about God's nature. Rather, it exposes what we DON'T know about God. Job is often cited as a righteous man whose conduct and attitude toward God we are to imitate. Many say, "Look how noble Job bears up under the hard hand of God." Others say, "Job loved God so much, even though God slew his sons, robbed his riches, afflicted his health, and crushed his happiness. If only we could approach suffering the way Job did, then we would be righteous too."

WRONG. If I presented you a 42-chapter book explaining my life, and filled with my thoughts and opinions of God, and THEN in the last chapter admitted that in the previous 41 chapters I really knew nothing about God and was almost entirely mistaken, you would be furious with me. You sure wouldn't take anything I said in those first 41 chapters seriously.

Well, this is EXACTLY what Job did. In the first 40 chapters, Job and his friends made some 74 false accusations about the nature of God, which ALL essentially blamed God as the wrathful source of all of Job's afflictions. But, Job himself admitted at the very end of the Book that for the previous FORTY CHAPTERS, he essentially knew NOTHING about God's nature. "Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer:

yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.... Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore, have I uttered THAT I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." Job 40:3-5; 42:3.

Job THOUGHT he knew God well DURING all the dialogues through the first forty chapters. But at the end of the matter, he repented for what he and his friends had previously thought and said about God in chapters 1-40. First, he admitted his own previous opinions about God were wrong, as quoted above. He recognized that God was "too wonderful" for his previous theology to rightly understand. Then, he summarized his sin as follows: "I have heard of You by the HEARING of the ear, but NOW my eyes SEE you. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:5-6. He THEN prayed for his three friends who did not speak of the Lord that "what is right" during the previous 40 chapters. Job 42:7-10. "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job...."

To take the first 40 chapters of Job as reliable theology on the nature of God and the problem of evil on any level is absurd. The point of Job is that men in their natural thinking have NO IDEA of the dynamics of God, Satan, good, and evil. The message of Job is NOT to follow in Job's footsteps, at least until chapter 40. Job did have a righteous appreciation and reverence of God throughout the whole book (Job 1:1, 8, 22; 2:3). BUT he was woefully ignorant of the Lord's flawless character AND Satan's role as the destroyer. He had righteously believed God

based on what he had heard, or been taught, in other words, BUT only at the end of the Book did he actually see, perceive, and EXPERIENCE the true essence of the Lord.

What was the newfound essence of God revealed at the end of Job? What is it that Job perceived that drove him to repent over his previously poor theology about the nature of God and the problem of evil? What drove him to his repentant knees? Simple. He EXPERIENCED the presence of God, perhaps for the first time in his life. He had heard "about" God from others, had righteously "believed" what he heard, and had even dutifully sacrificed "toward" and prayed "to" God. But Job had never been "WITH" God in His immediate and intimate presence.

Through the final scene of the Book, Job richly EXPERIENCED the presence and love of God as a hero, his hero who did not bring Job his captivity, but instead turned Job's captivity into blessing. Job saw God as the lover and deliverer of his soul. James 5:11 instructs us to focus on Job's end, not his beginning. Job's end saw him repentant and richly restored twofold in all he had previously lost. If we focus on Job's beginning, which describes his suffering and his "noble statements" of "bearing up" under God's "firm hand," we will make the mother of all mistakes. We will glorify men and not God. God never gets the glory for sending disasters, death, and destruction upon men as the beginning of Job

describes. Men, not God, are the only ones glorified when such statements are made as Job does in the following passages:

"And Job said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:21.

"What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil." Job 2:10.

"Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet Thou dost destroy me." Job 10:8.

"For it increaseth. Thou huntest me as a fierce lion: and again Thou sheweth Thyself marvelous upon me." Job 10:16.

"Are not my days few? Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little." Job 10:20.

"Thou art become cruel to me: with Thy strong hand thou opposest Thyself against me" Job 31:21.

"For destruction from God is a terror to me" Job 31:23.

"But now He hath made me weary: Thou hast made desolate all my company. And Thou hast filled me with wrinkles, which is a witness against me: and my leanness rising up in me beareth witness to my face. He teareth me in His wrath, who hateth me: He gnasheth upon me

with His teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth His eyes upon me." Job 16:7-9.

"He hath cast me into the mire, and I am become like dust and ashes." Job 30:19.

I could go on and on with Job's wrong statements about God, not to mention those also made by his misguided friends, but I think the above quotes offer a good sampling. The error is the same ---- God is the bringer of affliction, the bringer of evil, the bringer of disasters. This is totally contradicted by New Testament theology, specifically James 1:13-18, which says God doesn't use "evil" to "tempt" men and to "let no man say" He does. The Greek word in this passage for "tempt" is "periazo" and means "to test, entice, discipline, prove, tempt or try."(Strong's #3985).

Thus, God doesn't test man with evil, entice man with evil, discipline man with evil, prove man with evil, tempt man with evil, or try man with evil. And let no man say God DOES do these things, not EVEN Job or the author of the Book named after him. This James passage renders Job's "literal" reading IMPOSSIBLE to the extent that it "appears" to claim God DOES use EVIL by "testing" and "trying" Job's faith in some sort of arbitrary and perverted cosmic bet made with Satan in which God supposedly admits to Satan, "thou MOVED me against him (Job), to destroy him WITHOUT CAUSE." Job 2:3. Satan MOVES God to destroy men WITHOUT CAUSE?

No way! Never! That is blasphemous. Whatever Job means, it can't mean that. Job can't violate the James 1:13-18 passage. It can't violate Jesus. Jesus always trumps Job. New Covenant inspiration COMPELS us to reread Job and renovate its primitive and literal meaning WHENEVER it fails to conform to the nature and character of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

I even grant you that these Job passages quoted above were heartfelt sentiments that both Job and his friends were sincerely feeling, BUT they were sincerely wrong. Let me give a modern-day parallel. There is a well-known Christian author who was paralyzed in a diving accident as a teenager. She never tires of attributing the accident as coming from the hand of God in order to keep her from leading a sexually promiscuous lifestyle.

WHAT? God crippled her as a teen in order to keep her from sinning sexually? That is outrageous! Did Jesus ever bless or protect anybody by first crippling them or afflicting them with leprosy? NO! Aren't there some other ways God works chastity other than breaking teenage spines? How does this paint the goodness of God? She looks like a victim saint, while God looks like an unknowable monster. She even asks people not to pray for her healing, but instead to pray that she know God better. Sounds noble, and I am sure she is heartfelt in her beliefs, just as Job was, BUT again, who gets the glory here?

I hear so many Calvinists paint this woman as a modern-day Job who is a champion of faith and theology. God is left holding the bag of cruelty and evil. This is why atheism flourishes. Who can love a crippler of children? My heart aches for her and for those who follow her. As well-intentioned as they may all be, they are the blind leading the blind into a faithless ditch. Time and time again, this misguided woman preaches from the Book of Job, over and over and over. Audiences weep and weep and weep. And faith is weakened and weakened and weakened.

Trace the pastors and teachers who glorify this woman's theology, and you will know who to avoid if you are seeking the "captivity-turning" power of God. Bless them, but reject their teachings. They need to have an EXPERIENCE of God's presence, power, and goodness, just like Job, which will lead them to repent. Then they need to put their hands over their mouth and stop talking nonsense. Then, God will turn THEIR captivity and all will be well.

KEY NUMBER TWO: JOB WAS CLUELESS ABOUT THE EXISTENCE OF SATAN. Job, the man, never mentioned Satan. He was completely unaware of Satan's role in the murder of his children, the murder of his servants, the killing of his flocks, the destruction of his wealth, and the affliction of his health. Job directly attributed all these acts of violence and oppression solely

to the hand of the Lord. Job NEVER uttered the word Satan or Devil in the entire Book of Job.

We now know the reason. Old Testament saints had a dim and distorted view of Satan. This is discussed at length in the chapter entitled THE FORGOTTEN KEY TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, which includes numerous reference citations. The Old Testament saints, that is, the ones who even knew Satan existed, believed that the Devil was a servant angel of God performing an unpleasant but necessary job for the Lord. This Job was essentially to test, tempt, judge, punish, and eventually kill all men.

Old Testament believers did NOT see Satan as an ENEMY of God, or a REBEL leader OPPOSED to the Kingdom of Heaven on EVERY level. Rather, he was perceived as an enforcing angel fulfilling his role in the Lord's courts. The Jews knew him in various Old Testament passages as the Death Angel, the Destroyer, the Tempter, and even on occasion the Angel of the Lord, BUT he was always acting at the express command of God.

In short, Old Testament theology did not see Satan as EVIL. Jesus' response to this notion? NO! WRONG! UNTRUE! MISGUIDED! SATAN IS PURE EVIL ---- THE FATHER OF LIES, A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, THE ACCUSER OF THE BRETHREN, THE GREAT DRAGON, THE

SERPENT, THE GOD OF THIS WORLD, YOUR ADVERSARY, A ROARING LION SEEKING TO DEVOUR YOU, THE EVIL ONE, THE THIEF, THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR. Jesus came to reveal both His Father's Kingdom of Light AND Satan's Kingdom of Darkness. In fact, Jesus came to DESTROY the works of the Devil, NOT to approve them. 1 John 3:8. Jesus and the New Testament reveal that there is a cosmic rebellion and that the earth is a battlefield in which we are soldiers in constant need of spiritual armor and weapons of righteousness in our right hand and in our left.

So, where did this leave Job? Well, it left him clueless that the enemy of his soul was Satan. It left him uninformed, unprepared, and unarmed. Job never once resisted Satan, never once rebuked Satan, and never once put on "the full armor of God" THAT he would be "able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." Ephesians 6:13. Job was completely clueless as to the need for spiritual warfare. He didn't even know he had an enemy. He thought it all came directly from God, BOTH good and evil. In this ignorance, Job was even unaware that God had surrounded him with a protective "hedge" that Satan could not penetrate. Job 1:10. Once that hedge was lowered, Job was truly helpless and hopeless because his hidden enemy was assailing him from every angle, an enemy of which he was ENTIRELY ignorant.

I am sure we would all agree that the New Testament WAY is NOT to sit passively by while obvious Satanic attacks are destroying our children, friends, finances, and health. The New Testament way is to STAND and CONTEND against Satan, whom we are commanded to "resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:9). BUT, how could Job "resist" and "rebuke" Satan, as Jesus did in Matthew 17:18, if he wasn't even aware that he existed as an enemy of God? And more importantly, why oh why would we ever paint Job as a Scriptural model to follow when it comes to rightly responding to personal disasters? Jesus is our model for combat, not Job. Jesus IS the "whole armor of God" ---- living armor always ready to "quench ALL the fiery darts of the evil one." Ephesians 6:16.

So, what does the Book of Job ACCURATELY tell us about the nature of Satan? First, it confirms Satan's sphere of influence is HERE as he travels "to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Job 1:7; 2:2. The New Testament confirms this when it calls Satan "the God of this world.... and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19 (NASB).

Second, the Book of Job confirms that Satan operates destruction in the earth by using three deadly weapons: MEN (1:13-15, 17), NATURE (1:16, 18-19), and SICKNESS (2:7). Satan first inspired violent men, the Sabeans and Chaldeans, to murder Job's servants and flocks by the sword. Satan then manipulated nature,

"great wind" and "fire from heaven" (lightning), to kill Job's children as well as the remaining servants and sheep. Satan then finally infected Job with "boils" from head to toe. The New Testament confirms that Satan is able as "the Prince of the power of the air" to influence nature to try to kill (Ephesians 2:2; Matthew 8:26). Satan also entered into Judas, Pharisees, and mobs of stoners seeking to provoke them to kill Jesus at various times. Finally, Jesus cast out thousands of demonic spirits of infirmity during His earthly ministry.

Third, the Book of Job rightly describes that Satan operates all his DESTRUCTIONS only "OUTSIDE" of the PRESENCE OF GOD. Job 1:12; 2:6-7. Please review the chapter entitled TRACING THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD for a more in-depth discussion of this dynamic. Where the Lord is MANIFESTLY present, Satan cannot destroy or even penetrate the "hedge" of Holy Ghost protection surrounding the righteous. Obviously, the Lord is OMNIPRESENT, which means He is invisibly present everywhere at the same time. But, God is ONLY MANIFESTLY PRESENT where faith is operating to convert and catalyze God's available omnipresence UNTO OPEN MANIFESTATION.

In Mark 6, Jesus went back to Nazareth, ready to do all the mighty works of God. BUT their unbelief "quenched" Jesus' power to OPENLY APPEAR and MANIFEST, "And He could there do no mighty works." God was fully present there in the person of Jesus, but that presence

was not openly manifesting the power of God for all to see and encounter. And Jesus "marveled at their unbelief." The point here is that Satan only steals, kills, or destroys where Jesus' MANIFEST PRESENCE has been rejected, neglected, or unselected. "Quenched away," in other words. Here, the Lord's remaining OMNIPRESENCE will marvel, just as Jesus did, at the unbelief which keeps the Kingdom of Heaven from fully manifesting NOW into the current situation for all to see. All across the world right now, the Holy Spirit is marveling at the collective unbelief that hinders Him from fully demonstrating His loving power and presence to mankind. When Peter says we can "hasten the day of the Lord," he is acknowledging that our faith can enable the will of God to manifest more quickly upon the earth, as it is already manifest in Heaven.

Fourth, the Book of Job is correct in that Satan does accuse us in the Heavenly courts. Job 1:10-11; 2:4-5. The New Testament confirms this in Revelation 12:10, where Satan is described as the "accuser of our brethren," who is to be "cast DOWN, which accused them before our God day and night." There is some sort of courtroom imagery going on here, but Job omits one very important participant ---- Jesus. "And if any man sin, we have an ADVOCATE with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,"(1 John 2:1), which is to say we all have a DEFENDER, a champion, a hero who offers us protection in the Heavenly courts. Jesus demonstrated this to Peter when He told Him, "Satan hath desired

to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not..." (Luke 22:31-32). Do you see? Jesus "lives to intercede" and protect us, so that our faith will not fail. If we pay diligent heed to our "so great a salvation," we will receive the divine strengthening of Jesus. But, "if we neglect our so great a salvation, how shall we escape" the attacks of Satan. Hebrews 2:3. Pretty clear, isn't it?

So what was the Book of Job missing in its description of the Heavenly courtroom scenes in the first two chapters? Most importantly, it was missing the protective presence of Jesus, who has always been at the right hand of the Father, always seeking to "hedge" us with His divine presence. Job had the "hedge" but did not recognize that it was the "living hedge" of Jesus seeking to protect and surround him with divine favor. Satan, our accuser, versus Jesus, our advocate. The Book of Job does not properly convey this dynamic.

Moreover, the Book of Job, when "literally" read, has the wrong tone of the interactions between God and Satan. This is because ALL Old Testament authors, including the Book of Job, did not see Satan as an enemy devil

but rather as a servant angel. Does anybody really believe that God arbitrarily chose to lower Job's hedge so that He could win some friendly wager with Satan?

Does anybody really believe that the dead "letter" of Job 2:3 is accurate when it says that Satan "moved

God" against Job, "to destroy him WITHOUT cause..."? Likewise, is it conceivable that God would ever say to Satan, "All that Job hath is in thy power," as stated in Job 1:12, or that, "Behold, Job is in thy hand," as stated in Job 2:6? Certainly not. The first two chapters of Job give the appearance of WAY too much accommodation and cooperation between God and Satan. The New Testament does not give Satan the place or power to EVER "move" God to "destroy" men's lives "without cause." Jesus knows better than that, and so do we.

Deep breath. Honestly, can your heart imagine such arbitrary abandonment on the part of Jesus? Jesus would never turn us over to Satan to win some kind of perverted cosmic bet. NEVER! Is that New Testament love as described in 1 Corinthians 13? We certainly might turn OURSELVES over to Satan's power through our neglect or disbelief, which would then partially "quench away" Jesus' protective hedge. Then Satan would attempt to fill the vacuum with his destruction. But the moment we start repenting and believing again, the hedge returns to repair, renew, and restore.

And what are the benefits of that hedge? Let's hear what Satan says to God about the "hedge," because this may be the only absolutely true thing Satan ever said in the Scriptures: "Hast Thou not made a hedge around him, and around his house, and around all that he has on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land." Job 1:10. Again, that

hedge is Jesus. So the question is this: what action on the part of Job caused Satan to be able to penetrate that hedge? That is our next key.

KEY NUMBER THREE: JOB WAS CLUELESS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF HIS OWN FEAR

The author of Job did not have a New Testament understanding to perceive the real reason Job's protective "hedge" came down. So, instead, he just attributed it to the mysterious will of God as it was "moved" by Satan to "destroy Job "without cause." There was a cause that gave Satan access, but it wasn't God. It was the same cause that has always empowered Satan to wreak his destruction in this fallen world. That cause is the mother of all Satanic power. What is it? FEAR!

There is a reason Jesus said, "fear not, only believe" to Jairus in Luke 8:50. Fear gives Satan access to steal, kill, and destroy. Hebrews 2:14-15 suggests that Satan keeps mankind "all their lifetimes subject to bondage" through "FEAR of death." William James famously said, "Fear of death is the worm at the center of the core of every fear." "God has not given us the spirit of FEAR, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." 2 Timothy 1:7. Isaiah tells us "thou shall be FAR from oppression; for thou shalt NOT fear" (54:14). Paul tells us we have "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father," and thereby have "NOT received the spirit of

bondage AGAIN to FEAR." Romans 8:14-15. Jesus came to deliver us FROM fear TO faith.

The presence of "fear" in the human heart invites and incubates Satanic attacks. The New Testament is clear that WE are the ones who give access to Satan. Ephesians 4:27; John 14:30; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Ephesians 6:16. FEAR is the primary access. This works both on individual and corporate levels. Sometimes our fear gives Satan access to afflict us individually. Other times, our fear gives Satan access to afflict others nearby. Just like firsthand smoke can kill the one smoking, secondhand smoke can kill those nearby who inadvertently inhale. So too with fear. It not only corrupts us, but those around us.

So, how do we know Job had deep fear issues? Two major reasons. First, he admitted he did. "For what I fear has come upon me. And what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes." Job 3:25-26(NASB). This is perhaps the most accurate description of general anxiety ever given. No rest. No safety. Pure turmoil. Obsessive worrying. Voicing fears of worst-case scenarios. And what happened? WHAT he feared came upon him in full force.

The second evidence that Job had major fear issues concerned his anxiety over his children. Job 1:4-5 paints a disturbing picture. Job was so insecure regarding his children's relationship with God that he actually

FEARED the following: "It MAY be that my sons have sinned, and CURSED God in their hearts. Thus Job did CONTINUALLY." What a horrible thought to CONTINUALLY struggle with. Job was obsessed with the fear that his children were secretly cursing God. No wonder Job had no rest, no inner peace, no security. Job offered continual daily sacrifices for his adult children because of his fear, NOT because of his faith in God. And what happened? What Job most feared eventually came upon him- his children were killed, as well as his servants and flocks. His finances were plundered and his health broken. Fear draws oppression like honey draws flies.

The above passages show that Job's fear opened the door for all the Satanic attacks. Fear diminished the "Jesus Hedge." Satan attacked. Satan destroyed. Job initially got bad counsel. Job later got good counsel from Elihu. Job then experienced the presence of God. Job quickly repented, prayed for his errant friends, and after which he was fully restored. Doubly restored in fact.

At the beginning of the Book, Job had no clue that Satan was an enemy of God, OR that Satan feeds on the fear of men, OR that he had profound “fear strongholds” which empowered Satan. No wonder Job was essentially helpless and hopeless during the first 40 chapters of the Book. The New Testament gives much instruction on fear, faith, and resisting evil by rebuking Satan. Sadly, Job knew none of this New Covenant wisdom. And it cost him, but praise God, only for a season. The Book

of Job explains why we needed Jesus to show us a better way of overcoming evil powers. "There is no fear in love, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." 1 John 4:18. Jesus was made perfect in love because he had no fear. In contrast, Job was in torment, especially concerning his children, because he had not allowed perfect love to cast out HIS fear. Jesus trumps Job.

KEY NUMBER FOUR: JOB'S FRIENDS' OPINIONS WERE ALL CLUELESS EXCEPT ELIHU. Amazingly, only ONE person in the whole Book of Job came away unscathed as a true prophet of God's nature. It's not Job, who wrongly said, "Behold, GOD will slay me; I have no hope: Nevertheless I will maintain my ways before Him." Job 13:15(ASV). It's not Job's wife, who cruelly said to her husband, "Curse God and die." Job 2:9. It's not Job's three friends, who "did NOT speak the thing that is right" about the Lord. Job 42:7-9.

No, the only person who actually spoke righteously in the first 40 chapters was Elihu. He was the youngest of all who spoke. He was the last to speak. He was the only speaker God never rebuked as wrong. In fact, his great speech in Chapters 32-37 prophetically ushered in the presence of the Lord in Chapter 38. This is what a prophetic utterance should do ---- connect the audience with the manifest presence of God.

Before we look at the heart of what Elihu said, let's quickly summarize the erroneous "bottom lines" of both Job and his three friends ---- Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. It's very simple, really. Job's three friends all believed Job DESERVED the afflictions God sent BECAUSE of various theological reasons. God, so they said, was right to oppress Job, either because of Job's open or hidden sins. God, they believed, would not have sent wrath unless it was deserved on some level. The fact that God sent it meant that Job deserved it, regardless of how righteous Job's life appeared to be on the surface.

In contrast, Job's main argument was that he didn't deserve the destruction that came. He believed himself to be righteous and undeserving of the afflictions he suffered during this period. Most scholars believe that the whole book of Job took place over a nine-month period of time.

So, the bottom line of Job's three friends was that Job deserved his suffering. The bottom line of Job was that he didn't deserve his sufferings. But, the bottom line of Elihu was this ---- "Touching the Almighty... He is excellent in power, and in judgment, and plenty of justice: HE DOES NOT AFFLICT." Job 37:23. Do you see? Job and his three friends focused on whether or not man deserved the suffering that comes in life. Elihu, however, focused solely on the GOODNESS of God. Not everything Elihu said is perfect New Testament theology, but he largely focused on the key point: God is good, God is powerful, God is merciful, and God is fair. Elihu tenderly noted,

"But none sayeth, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" His point was that everybody was so busy either complaining or explaining Job's life away that nobody was actually seeking the Lord's good presence to set all things right. His theology was simply that GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT!

This same dynamic occurred in John chapter 9 concerning the man born blind. The crowd was all about assigning blame for the poor man's suffering. They wanted Jesus to enter their discussion by getting Him to assign blame for the man's blindness to EITHER the man's own sin or that of his parents. Jesus refused. Instead, He deflected the issue to God. His response was basically, "Neither is responsible for this, nonetheless let the glory of God be revealed!" Elihu did the exact same thing. How different our lives would be if we did the same thing.

When we start ascribing strength to God, He appears and delivers us from all evil. But when we ascribe strength to evil sufferings, or the afflictions of the world, or to what we do or don't deserve, we become Job-like instead of Jesus-like. Don't get me wrong, Job was righteous, far more at the end of the Book than the beginning, but even at the start, he had some admirable qualities. Job was a righteous man who was sincere in his beliefs, but sincerely wrong. Nonetheless, James 5:11 does commend Job's "endurance," so that begs the question, in light of Job's 40 chapters of "bad theology," what did Job "do

right" for those 40 chapters to earn a commendation for his "endurance?"

To his great credit, Job did not "sin with his lips," or "attribute folly to God" by cursing God as evil, even though his wife wanted him to do just that. Job 1:22; 2:9-10. Had Job said "God is evil" or "I curse God for His foolishness" or "God is a fool," then Job would have sinned with his lips. Job remained faithful to this concept: God knows best. Job did "endure" great sufferings without caving in to cursing God. This at least allowed him to remain open to repentance and restoration when it presented itself. Had he cursed or rejected God, then Satan might have been able to totally destroy his life and faith. Job hung in there until God could rescue and bless him.

However, Job lacked knowledge about Satan and the problem of evil. This gave him a huge blind spot, which Satan exploited. And exploited. And exploited. Job had no answers for his pain, other than that God sent it. This caused Job to then self-justify rather than God-magnify. Job 32:1-3; 40:1-2, 6-8. It sent him deeper and deeper into his great sadness. But, when Elihu suggested that GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT, the dawn of a new spiritual day came to Job's heart. In came the presence of a good God, and out went the destruction of an evil angel.

CONCLUSION: GOD DOES NOT AFFLICT

The JOB-EFFECT is over. Our eyes have now been opened to the always abiding light, movement, and momentum of God's goodness. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17.

No more shuddering or flickering understanding of His goodness. No more shoulder shrugging. No more fear. No more helplessness. No more BLAMING God for evil, suffering, or disasters. Satan is ALWAYS the killer and accuser, not Jesus. We can trust Jesus ---- never to harm us, always to arm us ---- with weapons of righteousness in our left hand and our right. 2 Corinthians 6:7. Be of good cheer! Jesus has OVERCOME the world, not Job. OUR faith in THAT fact is what allows US to also overcome our world.

Jesus trumps Job. Job is not the last word on the problem of suffering. Jesus is. The last word and the first, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is our HERO. Take heart! Just like He did for Peter, though Satan desires to sift us, Jesus has prayed for us that our faith won't fail. And it won't. Because He won't.

Chapter One Hundred Two

The Problem of Evil

So, what about the problem of evil?

Is God omni-causative, omni-deterministic, omni-retaliatory, omni-wrathful, and omni-coercive?

Or, rather, is God omni-responsive, omni-wise, omni-gentle, omni-wooing, and omni-patient?

The common proposition which must always be assessed, challenged, and rebutted is, "Since God is in absolute control of all events in the universe, both good and evil, he clearly ordains, allows, and wills evil since He could so easily stop it."

This is a horrendously abstract Calvinistic presumption and forces us to believe God is in meticulous control of

child rapes, child murders, and child slavery. I also don't believe that "whatever happens God obviously allows" since "He has the power to stop it."

No, Scriptures instead teach that the gifts of God are without repentance/recourse. He doesn't take them back in other words. The gift of some level of creaturely freedom so that the possibility of true love may be oxygenated isn't a gift He moodily takes back whenever He feels like raping our will, our words, and our ways.

First, the questions as stated presume God is a puppet master constantly pulling all the causative strings (or refusing to pull certain causative strings), therefore making Him the sole cause of all events —good and evil. God here becomes a necessary party complicit in evil's occurrence. God is pictured as a hyper sovereign "control freak" who allows some child rape (but not others), some child murders (but not others), some child tortures (but not others), some sex trafficking (but not others), and a thousand other horrors (but not others).

Jesus, who, through His incarnation and resurrection, displayed the fullness of the Godhead's nature —- NEVER allowed (when faith was present) the oppressions of evil to go unhealed and uncorrected (Acts 10:38) and which were in His immediate sphere of influence. The view of God Jesus explained (John 1:18) in fullness is 180 degrees incompatible with the presumptions on which these two questions are based.

In Mark 6, at Nazareth, Jesus arrived ready, willing, and able to perform mighty curative acts and powerful deliverances from all the evils in their midst. Yet, the passage paints a very different picture of God that the one painted by the two questions you presented. Jesus "COULD do NO mighty works" because of "their" corporate "unbelief," an unbelief at which Jesus "marveled" (marveled NOT in a good way).

Now, if the two questions' view of God was correct, Jesus "obviously allowed" those at Nazareth to disbelieve because He didn't immediately take over their minds forcibly, performing a mass mind rape in essence, and MAKE them to believe and MAKE them receive His gifts right then and there. The two questions say God "could" do this even though the Mark 6 passage says Jesus "couldn't."

The questions aren't deep enough.

I think the two questions' view hasn't gone deep enough in considering the nature and quality of creaturely freedom. If God can unilaterally revoke, manipulate, force, and coerce us to speak, act, or think as He commands, then we have no true freedom to begin with and we are nothing more than robotic puppets pulled (or not pulled) by God's causative hand. Some puppet humans' strings are pulled and forced to love God and other puppets, while other puppets are forced to hurt and

hate God and other puppets, while still other puppets are neglected altogether.

The hyper sovereign God contemplated by the two questions describe a deity who would instantly and unhesitatingly penetrate the mind of every puppet by taking over their actions and thoughts. Since God "could" stop all the hate, all the violence, all the evil.... and He "doesn't", then the paradigm behind the questions concludes God is sovereignly complicit in allowing evil.

What the two questions are predicated on is the philosophy of monergism. Monergism says that everything that happens is God's sovereign will and bears His stamp of approval. Even what God refused to stop becomes His affirmative, sovereign, and ordaining will. "God's permissions are His purposes", as Calvinism famously claims. We humans, by contrast, are inert. We do nothing, believe nothing, allow nothing, initiate nothing, accomplish nothing, affect nothing, and impact nothing. It's all Him. None of it is us. And while that sounds God-honoring at first, it ultimately defames Him by laying evil events on His doorstep.

Synergism, in contrast, says its God AND us co-operating together in a fluid dance where we elect to yield (or not) to fervently follow where God passionately leads. When He speaks in grace, we can elect (or not) to hear in faith. When He offers grace, we can elect (or not) to act on it. When He calls with grace, we can respond (or

not) with faith. Seen from this angle, God is non-coercive and will never force our will to DO anything. He will woo our will, empower it, enhance it, energize it, but He will never coerce it.

Under synergism, we CAN inhibit the grace of God, never totally, and never permanently, but in the short run we can delay and diminish its full manifestation in the here and now. This happened to Jesus in Mark 6:5-6 where He could do no mighty works because of their toxic unbelief.

Because God's nature is non-coercive, He has equipped us with a limited ability to say NO to Him, at least during this earth age. Love can only be received, never coerced. We have the power of consent, and even though this power may may only be the width of a gossamer wing, the slightest of contributions in other words, it still is vital. We are God's assigned agents of awe on this earth which elect (or not) to consent, allow, enforce and endorse the Lord's will.

If we don't choose synergism as our mindset, we will end up assigning all good AND all evil to God's monergism. Under monergism's view, we all are just paraplegically reclined in some thickly-pillowed cosmic "opium-den" of grace where God does EVERYTHING while we just lay there puffing ourselves high on visions of grace.

Monergism, in my opinion, is a road we dare not take.

We are called to be the active, energetic, and synergistic sons of God upon the earth. The whole earth is waiting for these champion sons of God to manifest. Monergism will never get us there. If it did, we would already be there. Synergism WILL get us there. Jesus is waiting for US to put His enemies under OUR foot here on earth---fear, wrath, sin and death--- just as these enemies have already been put under Jesus' foot in Heaven. All we need do is endorse, enforce and execute Jesus' already-accomplished victory to MANIFESTLY conform this realm to His reign. He awaits our consent.

The freedom of angels and men often combine to form interference patterns of resistant force with which we must diligently deal. The Lord is always willing to manifest to all men, but He often needs our synergistic cooperation to fully penetrate the situation at hand. He won't (and can't) coercively rape reality with His interventions. He travels on the yielded faith of men. This allows Him the consent He needs, the cosmic elbow room to deliver the situation by catalyzing it with the delivering energies of Christ.

Is there freewill?

I think where we sometimes err is in thinking that there either IS freewill or there ISN'T.

It's not so black and white.

There is a third option-- we have a measure of freedom, not complete but partial, just enough to oxygenate the possibility of love.

If we say that there is no freewill at all, then God becomes omni-causative (the sole and immediate cause of everything that happens 24/7. He immediately becomes the author of cancer, child molestations, rape, and a thousand other perversions, destructions, and devastations. "Back-door" Calvinism needs to be shown "the back door."

God stops resembling Jesus and instead resembles the Greek tyrant God Zeus who can use his cosmic lightning bolts to instantly incinerate evil the millisecond before or as it occurs. The Greeks believed that what Zeus didn't incinerate he was allowing, which is why he was seen as ultimately inscrutable and amoral. He was then understood as a fickle, temperamental, and sadistic divinity based on what he allowed to happen.

This presumes that God is is like the Greek God Zeus—full of lightning bolts ready to incinerate evil people, evil thoughts, evil events actors the second before they are about to occur. Since He doesn't intervene to stop evil, God obviously allows it. What you suggest is the essence of Calvinism. Myriads upon myriads of theologians don't believe Calvinism to be coherent or persuasive in the slightest.

Jesus is God's disallowance of evil.

The New Testament repeatedly portrays Jesus as an antidote to all things satanic, all things carnal, all things helpless, and all things hopeless. So, Jesus is the Godhead's decisive and all encompassing response to evil:

— He is the one who, during His life's personification and expression of God's absolute will against evil, "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

— He is the one the one who has conquered all fallen principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15).

— He is the one who eternally defeated death and hell (Revelation 1:18; 20:14).

— He is the one who transfused His curative energies to permanently reside both within us individually and among us corporately as His body, bride, and personal presence here on Earth. (Ephesians 4).

— He is the one who came to destroy all of Satan's works (1 John 3:8).

Satan is the one Jesus thrice called in the book of John "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), also calling him the "liar and murderer from the beginning" of mankind in Genesis (John 8:44). Paul likewise called Satan "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4),

an illegitimate usurper John the beloved told us "in whose power the whole world lies" (1 John 5:19) to some residual degree-- at least until Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 15 are both fulfilled by the mature church bride.

Since Jesus was in some sense the curative "lamb slain since the foundation of the world," I likewise see Him as God's "disallowance of evil since the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

Now here is the key.

Exactly HOW the revelation of Jesus as evil's antidote has “unfurled” itself over all time and all space is another question. The Christus Victor flag of “OUR deliverance from evil” and “GOD’S disallowance of evil” was put into effect simultaneously, if not even before, the Genesis fracture of creation.

This "unfurling" concept is crucial. It deserves some extended meditation.

So I don't see God as allowing evil in any sense. I believe HOW His disallowance "unfurls" itself over time, and how our corporate unbelief slows down that unfurling, is the real question. Peter said our corporate faith and agape action can actually "hasten the day of the Lord," or the manifest unfurling of His victory standard over all forms

of subjective and objective evil on earth and it's already been fully unfurled in heaven.

The flip side is that our individual and corporate unbelief can delay the manifesting of the sons and daughters of God as the generation that will fully and manifestly enforce Christ's absolute victory over all evil. So, how a non-coercive God disallows evil looks far different than how a lightning-hurling Zeus would disallow it, or an omni-causative puppeteer would disallow it.

How a non-coercive God, who has injected a measure of creaturely freedom into earthly existence, overcomes evil is another matter altogether. Through divine "faith" and divine "patience," we will "possess our souls" in virtue, and "inherit all the exceeding great and precious promises of God which provide us all things for life and godliness" (Luke 21:19; Hebrews 6:12; 2 Peter 1:3-5).

One of those promises is the heaven's past defeat and earth's future manifestation of that defeat of all the fallen powers and the resultant evil they have authored (and to which we have contributed). It's been sagely said that "human nature is Satan's favorite weapon of choice." Thankfully, Jesus' human-divine nature is the perfect disarming and dismantling agent for that weapon.

There remains another related challenge to reconciling the problem of evil with God's sovereignty, an issue which is routinely raised by philosophers. This is usually expressed in the following argument: “If God

is all-powerful, then He could have created the world without allowing evil's existence. So, since evil clearly exists, God either isn't all-powerful, or, in the alternative, God IS the creator and approver of evil."

Here is my response to the above flawed argument.

God IS all-powerful, but only within the context of His character. There are certain qualities that are NOT in the divine nature, a nature which God won't EVER violate. Men certainly violate these qualities, but not God, not Jesus, not the Spirit.

For instance, Scripture says that it is impossible for God to lie. Titus 1:2. But, some would say, "Sure God can lie, He is all-powerful after all." But, no, it is impossible for Him to act outside of His flawless nature of love, light, Spirit, truth and grace. He won't lie because it is AGAINST His nature.

This is easy to see in the context of lying, but what about other qualities which are NOT to be found in the divine nature of God? What if violence, coercion, brutality, manipulation, coercion, and pettiness are NOT in His character? Well, there can be only one conclusion: God's omnipotence must always be defined within the context of His character. He is all-powerfully good, all-powerfully forgiving, all-powerfully healing, all-powerfully truthful, all-powerfully patient, all-powerfully restorative, etc. But, He is NOT all-powerfully cruel, all-powerfully

condemning, all-powerfully vindictive, all-powerfully violent, all-powerfully coercive, etc.

Thus, God wont lie to us, kill us, coerce us, manipulate us, brutalize us, abuse us, threaten us or terrorize us. God will protect us, bless us, correct us, teach us, convince us, strengthen us, encourage us and deliver us. Consider the following passage from Saint Anselm:

"How can you be omnipotent, O God, if you cannot do all things? How can you do all things if you cannot sin - - if you cannot lie, if you cannot make false what is true? If you are unable to sin, you cannot claim to be able to do all things. Or is it that sin stems not from power, but from powerlessness? For those who commit sin have so little power over their own natures that they actually harm themselves. They are at the mercy of forces which they cannot oppose . . . .The more people have power to commit sin,the more they are powerless. So, Lord God, you are in fact more truly omnipotent because you cannot act through powerlessness." Proslogion, Chapter 7.

So, the next time…

somebody pulls out the worn out argument that if God is all-powerful, He would immediately zap to oblivion all evildoers with His Zeus-like lightning bolts, THEREFORE whatever happens must be His permissive will or He would have zapped it into oblivion, you know

what to say. Jesus is God. God is all-powerful LOVE. Anything outside of LOVE is not in God's nature. God does save us to the uttermost, but ONLY by His limitless virtue. He always overcomes evil one way and one way only, with patience, love, and goodness.

The day I removed the terms "force" and "coercion" out and away from my image of God's character, and replaced them with "wooing" and "influence," so many things began to change for me spiritually.

I stopped viewing God as an omni-causative "control-freak," an obsessive cosmic puppeteer who pulls all the causative strings of His creation 24/7.

I stopped viewing God as a bipolar "reality rapist" who would capriciously force His will upon us to either execute His wrathful will or His coercive love whenever He "felt like it."

I stopped blaming God for my/our individual and corporate misuses of my/our creaturely freedom.

I stopped blaming God for the resultant evil which filled the vacuum caused by the angelic and human misuse of their creaturely freedoms.

In short, I stopped blaming God.

Instead, I began cultivating and esteeming "God's immutable and unchangeable will to all goodness."
-William Law.

I became fully convinced that, "God is light and in Him is no darkness-- at all." 1 John 1:5.

I resolved to never think, say, or insinuate that God has any causative connection to evil, or that He uses evil as a sculpting tool on us in any way, either passively or actively. James 1:13-17.

Jesus IS God's complete "disallowance of" and "deliverance from" all evil.

Unfurling.

Now, again, exactly HOW that disallowance and deliverance unfurls itself over all time and all space is the real question. There are several other factors which can either hasten or hinder the speed at which this "unfurling" of God's disallowance of evil manifests itself openly to all our senses.

The most important factor is the maturity level of His church, bride, and body. The quicker we corporately mature in unity and love up and into Christ's full headship, the quicker the unfurling openly manifests (see Ephesians 4). Conversely, the slower we corporately mature, the slower the unfurling manifests.

Hence the admonishment from Hebrews which asks "How shall we escape (the talons of evil) if we neglect our so great a salvation." Corporate and individual neglect

slows the “unfurling,” while corporate and and individual devotional diligence hastens the unfurling.

This is what what Peter means when he exhorts us to "hasten" the fullness of the Lord's coming-- i.e. we CAN "hasten the day of the Lord's fullness." 2 Peter 3:12. The two master ingredients in this are the corporate Bride’s faith and patience. Hebrew 6:12.

I have concluded that God, for His part, always "hastens to the highest available good" in any and every situation, subject of course to all the various limiting dynamics which exist in a temporally free creation.

Until Christ is fully and openly manifest though US as His body and bride upon the earth, the scorched sky of unbelief, misbelief, and disbelief will continue to hinder His will from fully manifesting on earth as it is in Heaven.

The Bride's role is to continue to diligently punch holes in this scorched sky so that the Son's curative light can FULLY shine Heavens's will on all our circumstances. Paul tells us all creation is groaning for this scorched sky to be fully dispelled. Romans 8:19-22.

A thought experiment.

Here is a thought experiment on Jesus’ omni-willingness to intervene and decisively “disallow evil” in our life situations with His curative powers.

I think we can agree that if Jesus, during His incarnation, was PHYSICALLY present while a woman and her child were being physically assaulted by a gang of cutthroat brigands. We intuitively know Jesus would have quickly intervened to stop it (as He did with the woman caught in adultery).

Jesus might have used some natural means, but more than likely, sticking to His normal modus operandi, He would have used some supernatural means to save the victims. He used supernatural wisdom to disarm the mob mentality seeking to kill the adulteress. Jesus Himself supernaturally slipped right through and past hostile mobs who were trying to kill Him on several occasions.

But, in any event, the Jesus revealed by BOTH the Gospel AND our Spirit-quickened consciences would NOT have stood idly by doing nothing. That's inconceivable given the parameters of our thought experiment.

Jesus would not have:

--continued to walk past the event to keep His ministry events on schedule

--stood by watching and shaking His head in empathy while the abuse continued

--turned His face the other way in revulsion, planning to later help the victims cope with their injuries, assuming of course they survived.

As sure as the Sun rises, we know the Jesus of the Gospels would have stopped this brutality-- immediately, decisively, and skillfully. Acts 10:38 tells us that, "Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, and went around doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil." No Gospel narrative (other than the events surrounding the Crucifixion in which Jesus voluntarily lowered His divine defenses) describes Jesus EVER allowing any form of physical brutality, demonic activity, or physical infirmity to go unchallenged which was afflicting any third party who was in His immediate presence and who was seeking His help.

Now, to continue the thought experiment, change the peril to any one of a hundred menacing scenarios.

--the woman and her child were in the death throes of a plague

--the woman and her child were decomposing from leprosy

--the woman and her child were being victimized by an abusive husband/father

--the woman was suffering from a severe mental disorder and was attempting to smother her child

--the child was having an epileptic fit and had swallowed his own tongue

--the mother had just suffered a stroke related to her brain cancer and was now unresponsive on the ground as her weeping child tried to awaken her

--the woman and her child were about to be killed by a rockslide

REGARDLESS of the peril, what would the Jesus of the Gospels have done in coming physically upon these situations? It's obvious. Jesus' immediate presence would have stopped each of these tragedies dead in their tracks.

Here then is the point. We KNOW the will of God is to always heal and protect when Jesus is PHYSICALLY present. It's clear and irrefutable. How is it then that we have come to LOSE that knowledge of His healing will when God is only SPIRITUALLY present--- here in our modern day life situations in other words?

How can we now say God's will towards healing has gone from kinetic (moving) in Jesus' day to static (not moving) in our day? Has Jesus changed His willing mind or curative nature? Or, is the problem imbedded somewhere on OUR side of the CORPORATE equation?

Is it possible that something is hindering or obstructing Jesus' total willingness to do mighty works of curative deliverance here today? If so, could it be the same dark dynamic which hindered Jesus from doing mighty curative works in Nazareth as detailed in Mark 6 (except

that He still healed a few sick people), where despite Jesus' absolute willingness, their CORPORATE (not individual) unbelief kept those works from manifesting in their midst-- a corporate unbelief which caused Jesus to "marvel" (and not in a good way) that they were missing the time of their curative visitation.

Nazareth is so instructive, because in that narrative we have all the relevant elements-- an always willing-to-heal Lord NONETHELESS obstructed by a corporate (not individual) mindset and heart-set of unbelief.

God, as most theologians readily acknowledge, is in some sense omni-present. God is present everywhere in some continuous capacity today, here and now. But, that by itself isn't enough to release His personal presence (which I would define as the kinetically curative Jesus revealed in the Gospels) to full manifestation.

So, again, I have to conclude that some dynamic on our CORPORATE side of the equation is "quenching" Jesus' kinetically curative presence back into static latency.

The widespread failure to heal today simply can't be Jesus' LACK of willingness. So again I go back to Nazareth as the template of explanation for His un-manifested mighty works. There was a scorched sky of CORPORATE unbelief in Nazareth which kept the Lord's healing light from fully shining through to do the mighty works which were in His heart to do. Again, He was able to heal a few sick people, just as a few

sick people today continue to receive healing from time to time through prayers of faith, but not nearly on the wide scale we would see as ideal for a fully functioning body of Christ. The reason? We are living today in a postmodern Nazareth laboring under a scorched sky of corporate unbelief.

The freedom of angels and men often combine to form interference patterns of resistant force with which we must diligently deal. The Lord is always willing to manifest, but He often needs our synergistic cooperation to fully penetrate the situation at hand. He won't (and can't) coercively rape reality with His interventions. He travels on the active faith of men. This allows Him the consent He needs, the cosmic elbow room to deliver the situation by catalyzing it with the delivering energies of Christ.

So, what question should we ask?

The question then is NOT "whether" or "why" God intervenes or not in human affairs.

Rather, the question is "whether" or "why" WE (corporately as the body of Christ) intervene or not.

God's interventions of deliverances need OUR corporate synergistic faith, catalyzing prayer, and enabling action for His deliverances to fully manifest here on earth as they are already manifest in Heaven. God has already

intervened to the max in every past, present and future situation. His Spirit fills all things (Ephesians 1:23; 4:7-10).

God's pre-destinies (Ephesians 2:10) swirl around us like butterflies coiled in potentiality, eagerly waiting to be sprung into actuality by our prayers of faith. But our corporate unbelief can "quench" and "bench" these potentialities into the realm of the unrealized.

Chapter One Hundred Three

Asking "Why does God allow evil?" is not a fair way to frame the question.

Asking "WHY does God allow evil?" is not a fair way to frame the question.

Why?

Because it presumes that He DOES allow evil. I propose a higher and worthier view of Him.

Asking instead, "DOES God allow evil in the first place?" is the fairer question. It challenges the premise itself.

Here is the key to approaching this question with new eyes. The way a non-coercive God "disallows evil" might look far different than does the way a Zeus-like god of coercion would forcefully "disallow" it.

The latter god uses ALL forms of control, violence, and coercion, and, in so doing, uses evil to stop evil, becoming a different form of the very evil he sought to disallow. The former God, however, doesn't coerce, never coerces, but instead uses gentle persuasion and relentless patience to ultimately overcome and disallow evil. It may take longer that way, but it's a deeper and far more qualitative work.

Here is the ultimate truth. Jesus IS God's disallowance of all evil. Once we understand this, the following verse comes into focus.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire lacking nothing. " James 1:2-4.

Consider the four "P" virtues of God below, virtues which Jesus personifies.

Jesus is the PATIENCE of God. He will outlast all our deception and defiance and convince us all to voluntarily enter His kingdom.

Jesus is the PERSUASION of God to whom all will ultimately yield. Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, from a fully persuaded heart and mouth, that Jesus is the Lord of love and light. His wisdom, beauty, and truth are ultimately irresistible. Lies and deception simply lack the strength of eternity. They will wither eventually.

Jesus is the PERSPECTIVE of God. He is God's wisdom, through whose interpretive eyes God perceives us, our world, our inherent worth, our life situations, and all the beneficial meanings of Scripture. Most importantly, Jesus is God's perspective on the issue of good and evil. What He considered important we consider important. What He considered unimportant we consider unimportant. We have been given His wisdom, the very mind of Christ, to use as our perpetual perspective in all things. This is why Paul tells us to put on the mind of Christ.

Jesus is the POWER of God, a power that does not move in the coercion "of" man but rather in cooperation "with" man. His power doesn't return evil for evil, but rather acts in the opposite Spirit by returning good for evil, love for hate, and mercy for wrath. And by this, all evil shall be overcome by all good. All men WILL be persuaded to turn to the Lord. And Christ will be all-in-all.

Here is my short answer as to why Jesus is absolute living proof that God doesn't allow evil. Or, put another way, Jesus IS God's complete disallowance of evil.

The New Testament repeatedly portrays Jesus as an antidote to all things satanic, all things carnal, all things helpless, and all things hopeless. So, Jesus is the Godhead's decisive and all-encompassing response to evil:

--He is the one who, during His life's personification and expression of God's absolute will against evil, "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

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This "unfurling" concept is crucial. It deserves some extended meditation.

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of God as the generation that will fully and manifestly enforce Christ's absolute victory over all evil. So, how a non-coercive God disallows evil looks far different than how a lightning-hurling Zeus would disallow it, or an omni-causative puppeteer would disallow it.

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Thus, God won't lie to us, kill us, coerce us, manipulate us, brutalize us, abuse us, threaten us, or terrorize us. God

will protect us, bless us, correct us, teach us, convince us, strengthen us, encourage us, and deliver us. Consider the following passage from Saint Anselm:

"How can you be omnipotent, O God, if you cannot do all things? How can you do all things if you cannot sin - - if you cannot lie, if you cannot make false what is true? If you are unable to sin, you cannot claim to be able to do all things. Or is it that sin stems not from power, but from powerlessness? For those who commit sin have so little power over their own natures that they actually harm themselves. They are at the mercy of forces which they cannot oppose . . . .The more people have power to commit sin,the more they are powerless. So, Lord God, you are in fact more truly omnipotent because you cannot act through powerlessness." Proslogion, Chapter 7.

So, the next time somebody pulls out the worn-out argument that if God is all-powerful, He would immediately zap to oblivion all evildoers with His Zeus-like lightning bolts, THEREFORE whatever happens must be His permissive will or He would have zapped it into oblivion, you know what to say. Jesus is God. God is all-powerful LOVE. Anything outside of LOVE is not in God's nature. God does save us to the uttermost, but ONLY by His limitless virtue. He always overcomes evil one way and one way only, with patience, love, and goodness.

The day I removed the terms "force" and "coercion" out and away from my image of God's character, and replaced them with "wooing" and "influence," so many things began to change for me spiritually.

I stopped viewing God as an omni-causative "control-freak," an obsessive cosmic puppeteer who pulls all the causative strings of His creation 24/7.

I stopped viewing God as a bipolar "reality rapist" who would capriciously force His will upon us to either execute His wrathful will or His coercive love whenever He "felt like it."

I stopped blaming God for my/our individual and corporate misuses of my/our creaturely freedom.

I stopped blaming God for the resultant evil that filled the vacuum caused by the angelic and human misuse of their creaturely freedoms.

In short, I stopped blaming God.

Instead, I began cultivating and esteeming "God's immutable and unchangeable will to all goodness." ~~ William Law.

I became fully convinced that "God is light and in Him is no darkness-- at all." 1 John 1:5.

I resolved to never think, say, or insinuate that God has any causative connection to evil, or that He uses evil as

a sculpting tool on us in any way, either passively or actively. James 1:13-17.

I began to realize that Jesus IS God's complete "disallowance of" and "deliverance from" all evil. Now, again, exactly HOW that disallowance and deliverance unfurls itself over all time and all space is the real question. Several other factors can either hasten or hinder the speed at which this “unfurling” of God’s disallowance of evil manifests itself openly to all our senses.

The most important factor is the maturity level of His church, Bride, and body. The quicker we corporately mature in unity and love up and into Christ’s full headship, the quicker the unfurling openly manifests (see Ephesians 4). Conversely, the slower we corporately mature, the slower the unfurling manifests.

Hence, the admonishment from Hebrews which asks, “How shall we escape [the talons of evil] if we neglect our so great a salvation?” Corporate and individual neglect slows the “unfurling,” while corporate and individual devotional diligence hastens the unfurling.

This is what Peter means when he exhorts us to "hasten" the fullness of the Lord's coming-- i.e., we CAN "hasten the day of the Lord's fullness." 2 Peter 3:12. The two master ingredients in this are the corporate Bride’s faith and patience. Hebrew 6:12.

I have concluded that God, for His part, always "hastens to the highest available good" in any and every situation, subject, of course, to all the various limiting dynamics which exist in a temporally free creation.

Until Christ is fully and openly manifest through US as His body and Bride upon the Earth, the scorched sky of unbelief, misbelief, and disbelief will continue to hinder His will from fully manifesting on Earth as it is in Heaven.

The Bride's role is to continue to diligently punch holes in this scorched sky so that the Son's curative light can FULLY shine Heaven's will on all our circumstances. Paul tells us all creation is groaning for this scorched sky to be fully dispelled. Romans 8:19-22.

Here is a thought experiment on Jesus' omni-willingness to intervene and decisively "disallow evil" in our life situations with His curative powers.

I think we can agree that if Jesus, during His incarnation, was PHYSICALLY present while a woman and her child were being physically assaulted by a gang of cutthroat brigands. We intuitively know Jesus would have quickly intervened to stop it (as He did with the woman caught in adultery).

Jesus might have used some natural means, but more than likely, sticking to His normal modus operandi, He would have used some supernatural means to save the

victims. He used supernatural wisdom to disarm the mob mentality seeking to kill the adulteress. Jesus Himself supernaturally slipped right through and past hostile mobs who were trying to kill Him on several occasions.

But, in any event, the Jesus revealed by BOTH the Gospel AND our Spirit-quickened consciences would NOT have stood idly by doing nothing. That's inconceivable given the parameters of our thought experiment.

Jesus would not have:

--continued to walk past the event to keep His ministry events on schedule

--stood by watching and shaking His head in empathy while the abuse continued

--turned His face the other way in revulsion, planning to later help the victims cope with their injuries, assuming, of course, they survived.

As sure as the Sun rises, we know the Jesus of the Gospels would have stopped this brutality-- immediately, decisively, and skillfully. Acts 10:38 tells us that, "Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, and went around doing good, healing all who were oppressed by the devil." No Gospel narrative (other than the events surrounding the Crucifixion in which Jesus voluntarily lowered His divine defenses) describes Jesus EVER allowing any form of physical brutality, demonic activity,

or physical infirmity to go unchallenged, which was afflicting any third party who was in His immediate presence and who was seeking His help.

Now, to continue the thought experiment, change the peril to any one of a hundred menacing scenarios.

--the woman and her child were in the death throes of a plague

--the woman and her child were decomposing from leprosy

--the woman and her child were being victimized by an abusive husband/father

--the woman was suffering from a severe mental disorder and was attempting to smother her child

--the child was having an epileptic fit and had swallowed his own tongue

--the mother had just suffered a stroke related to her brain cancer and was now unresponsive on the ground as her weeping child tried to awaken her

--the woman and her child were about to be killed by a rockslide

REGARDLESS of the peril, what would the Jesus of the Gospels have done in coming physically upon these situations? It's obvious. Jesus' immediate presence would have stopped each of these tragedies dead in their tracks.

Here then is the point. We KNOW the will of God is to always heal and protect when Jesus is PHYSICALLY present. It's clear and irrefutable. How is it then that we have come to LOSE that knowledge of His healing will when God is only SPIRITUALLY present--- here in our modern-day life situations, in other words?

How can we now say God's will towards healing has gone from kinetic (moving) in Jesus' day to static (not moving) in our day? Has Jesus changed His willing mind or curative nature? Or, is the problem embedded somewhere on OUR side of the CORPORATE equation?

Is it possible that something is hindering or obstructing Jesus' total willingness to do mighty works of curative deliverance here today? If so, could it be the same dark dynamic which hindered Jesus from doing mighty curative works in Nazareth as detailed in Mark 6 (except that He still healed a few sick people), where despite Jesus' absolute willingness, their CORPORATE (not individual) unbelief kept those works from manifesting in their midst-- a corporate unbelief which caused Jesus to "marvel" (and not in a good way) that they were missing the time of their curative visitation.

Nazareth is so instructive, because in that narrative we have all the relevant elements-- an always willing-to-heal Lord, NONETHELESS obstructed by a corporate (not individual) mindset and heart-set of unbelief.

God, as most theologians readily acknowledge, is in some sense omnipresent. God is present everywhere in some continuous capacity today, here and now. But, that by itself isn't enough to release His personal presence (which I would define as the kinetically curative Jesus revealed in the Gospels) to full manifestation.

So, again, I have to conclude that some dynamic on our CORPORATE side of the equation is "quenching" Jesus' kinetically curative presence back into static latency.

The widespread failure to heal today simply can't be Jesus' LACK of willingness. So again, I go back to Nazareth as the template of explanation for His unmanifested mighty works. There was a scorched sky of CORPORATE unbelief in Nazareth, which kept the Lord's healing light from fully shining through to do the mighty works which were in His heart to do. Again, He was able to heal a few sick people, just as a few sick people today continue to receive healing from time to time through prayers of faith, but not nearly on the wide scale we would see as ideal for a fully functioning body of Christ. The reason? We are living today in a postmodern Nazareth laboring under a scorched sky of corporate unbelief.

The freedom of angels and men often combine to form interference patterns of resistant force with which we must diligently deal. The Lord is always willing to manifest, but He often needs our synergistic cooperation to fully penetrate the situation at hand. He won't (and

can't) coercively rape reality with His interventions. He travels on the active faith of men. This allows Him the consent He needs, the cosmic elbow room to deliver the situation by catalyzing it with the delivering energies of Christ.

The question then is NOT "whether" or "why" God intervenes or not in human affairs.

Rather, the question is "whether" or "why" WE (corporately as the body of Christ) intervene or not.

God's interventions of deliverances need OUR corporate synergistic faith, catalyzing prayer, and enabling action for His deliverances to fully manifest here on Earth as they are already manifest in Heaven. God has already intervened to the max in every past, present, and future situation. His Spirit fills all things (Ephesians 1:23; 4:7-10). His pre-destinies (Ephesians 2:10) swirl around us like butterflies coiled in potentiality, eagerly waiting to be sprung into actuality by our prayers of faith. But our corporate unbelief can "quench" and "bench" these potentialities into the realm of the unrealized.

So, I think there are three conceptual choices when it comes to God's response to intervening prayer:

1) God says "yes" to some healing interventions and "no" to others.

2) God says a provisional "yes" to all healing interventions, but something on our corporate [NOT individual] side of the equation hinders or obstructs the fullness of healing from manifesting. Mark 6:1-6.

3) God neither says "yes" or "no" to particular healings but remains detached and uninvolved.

1 and 3 are unacceptable for the following reasons:

-- Jesus never said "no" to any particular request for healing (2 Corinthians 1:9-20)

-- many times Scriptures say Jesus healed "all" who came to Him (Acts 10:38; Matthew 4:23-24; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 15:30; Luke 4:40; 6:17)

-- the only time Jesus was obstructed from healing "all" came from a corporate hindrance, not from a lack of willingness or consent on HIS part (Mark 6:1-6)

-- healing appears to be promised in several New Testament passages (James 5:15; I Peter 2:24 and its fulfillment in Matthew 8:16; Mark 3:15; 16:18; Luke 9:2, 10:9; John 14:12-14)

-- if God refuses to heal some mothers and children of cancer while healing others, then He is capricious and cruel

-- if God stays away from healing altogether, then He is capricious, cruel, and, even worse, He has placed all

of us in a death-trap creation in which disaster, disease, devastation, and destruction reign supreme, a terminally infectious creation for which He alone is responsible.

Failed healing largely exists because the church corporate doesn't teach, pray, or believe in unity of heart and purpose. In short, the church doesn't effectively model coherent belief in a healing God. The church bride is here to relieve and/or cure the world's suffering, but we are too busy disagreeing and blaming rather than agreeing and blessing.

And let me be clear-- I am not attributing any particular person's unrealized healing to any singular person's lack of faith. That's far too simplistic and just plain wrong. I am speaking in the corporate sense. We are all connected to one another, in seen and unseen ways, in conscious and subconscious ways, in spiritual and unscriptural ways. When the revelation of the healer bride reaches a critical mass of realization within the corporate mass of believers, I believe there will be an explosion of "mighty works" upon the Earth even greater than seen in the days of Jesus and the early church (John 14:12-14). A rising tide lifts all the boats.

Christ, for His part, is always ready, willing, and able to manifest His rescuing power in every situation of need. But the church is His spigot of release here on the Earth, a spigot which we haven't yet learned to corporately open full throttle.

But I always try to remember this champion truth toward which we are all called to evolve together. Our heavenly Abba "hath put all things under His (Jesus') feet , and gave Him (Jesus) to be the head over ALL THINGS TO the CHURCH. Which is His (Jesus') body, the fulness of him that fills ALL IN ALL." Ephesians 1:22-23. It's going to happen sooner or later. Sooner is so infinitely better, so may the unified vision begin. And may we each play a vibrant part.

Chapter One Hundred Four

The Wrath of God

If it's FROM ABOVE, it's good.

"He said to them, 'You are from below; I am FROM ABOVE. You are of this world; I am not of this world.'" - John 8:23

"He [Jesus] who comes FROM ABOVE is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from Heaven is above all." - John 3:31

"Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is FROM ABOVE, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change." - James 1:16-17.

"[T]he wisdom FROM ABOVE is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. -

[But] the wisdom that comes FROM BELOW...is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice." James 3:17-18, 15-16.

The "revelation of the wrath of God from the heavens" ABOVE which Romans 1 speaks of is merely the revelation of Jesus as curative love and restorative light.

Abba's wrath is a revelation that "the perfect Heavenly Father" overcomes evil only and always with the power of His goodness. Matthew 5:38-48 (read verse 48, then work backwards to see how the "Father's perfection" is defined by His love and blessing of enemies).

The term "God's wrath," as a term, is ultimately revealed as both ironic and oxymoronic as we expand our recognition that the heavenly Father's response to evil, as revealed by and through Jesus, is ALWAYS restorative, His corrections ALWAYS curative, His punishments ALWAY purgative-- as they are with any good and loving father.

Here is the interpretive issue. The OT had an undifferentiated view of God, which still linked Satan

and God at the conceptual hip. They believed that Satan was God's left hand of wrath, His angry voice, His obedient servant angel, His minister of temptation and punishment, His death angel. I document all this in the attached link with numerous quotes from both Jewish and Christian scholars. Satan: Old Testament Servant Angel or New Testament Cosmic Rebel Http://www.clarion-journal.com/clarion_journal_of_spirit/2013/11/satan-old-testament-servant-angel-or-new-testament-cosmic-rebel-by-richard-murray.html#more

I have believed for some time now that what we have imprudently called "the wrath of God" is, in reality, the misnamed, unrecognized, and unattributed "works of Satan" (this is true regardless of whether we consider the devil to be a dark angel OR a dark dynamic working within the psyche of coprate humanity).

Even the Old Testament confuses these two concepts--"the works of Satan" and "the anger of God." This is easily proven by considering the incident in which King David sinned by numbering Israel. This incident is first recorded in 2 Samuel 24:1, and then centuries later in 1 Chronicles 21:1. In the earlier entry, David's sin is caused by "the anger of God," while in the later passage, "Satan's provocation" is the cause of David's sin.

"And again THE ANGER OF THE LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." 2 Sam. 24:1.

"And SATAN stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel..." 1 Chr. 21:1.

In short, these two passages establish that the OT saints believed "the destructive ministry of Satan" WAS "the anger of the Lord." They are equivalent. It's pretty obvious. The terms were interchangeable to them. Had they received the NT upgrade on the divine nature brought by Jesus, they would have known better. They would know Satan was a cosmic rebel opposed to God, not an obedient servant angel just following the Father's wrathful orders. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, not approve or use them. 1 John 3:8.

The above passages describe the same event where David sinned by numbering Israel. Same event. Same David. Same sin. Same result: 70,000 dead Israelites, but a different cause of evil. The Samuel passage attributes it to "the anger of the Lord," while the later Chronicles passage attributes it to "Satanic provocations." Thus, Satan's destructions were equated with God's wrath. The implications of this are huge.

I recently discovered FURTHER fascinating support for the above proposal. The Jews, both in their Talmudic and Post-Talmudic literature, believed that Samael (literally "the wrath or poison of God") was another name for Satan. They equated "God's wrath" with "Satan's oppressions."

The Talmud states:

“[T]he evil Spirit, Satan, and Sama'el the Angel of Death, are the same" (Rabba Batra, 16a); and Samael there is also made synonymous with the Biblical serpent of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

“In The Holy Kabbalah (Arthur Edward Waite, 255), Samael is described as the ‘wrath of God.’ Samael/Satan is a major archangel in Talmudic and post-Talmudic lore, a figure who is the accuser (devil), seducer, and destroyer, and has been regarded at various times as both good and evil.

"Satan/ Samael, the prince of demons and/or destructive angel, has had many incarnations in Jewish literature. In several texts, 'Samael' seems to be the name of the Angel of Death. At least once in the Zohar, he is declared the 'shadow of death,' a kind of consort to Death (I: 160b). In other texts, he is regarded as synonymous with Satan, but almost as often he is treated as a separate entity (BhM 1:58-61; Ex. R. 21:7). Elsewhere, Samael is called 'chief of all the satans' (Dent. R. 11:10; III Enoch). In Midrash Konen, Samael is the prince of the third gate to Gehenna, the gate that opens on Jerusalem (2:30).

“Samael has made many earthly appearances. In Pirkei de-Rabbi Eleazer (13), he is described as the greatest angel in Heaven, who out of jealousy over the creation of humanity, decided to tempt Eve. Appearing in the form of the serpent, he actually copulated with her (Targum Jonathan, Gen. 4:1; Zohar I: 37a). He is one

candidate that the tradition has identified to be the angel who wrestled with Jacob (Zohar, I: 148a-b). Satan-like, he accused Israel of idol worship while they dwelt in Egyptian slavery (Ex. R. 21:7). He attempted to claim the soul of Moses, who fended him off with his miraculous rod.... He is the tempting angel from whom the Evil Inclination emanates.... In later Chasidic thought, Samael is the organizing force of the kelipot, the garments of evil that enshroud the divine vine sparks contained in all things." ~~THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH MYTH, MAGIC AND MYSTICISM, Samael entry, by Rabbi Geoffrey W. Dennis, Llewellyn Publications (2007).

So then, in the Jewish Talmud, Midrash, and Dead Sea Scrolls, Satan is portrayed as being intimately involved in luring and misleading the Old Testament saints into destructive attitudes and situations. Even though Satan was not explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament textual lives of these Old Testament saints, these later Jewish writers nonetheless perceived Satan throughout the subtext of their stories. They often flushed Satan out of the shadows into the open. They saw that Satan was always there embedded in the Old Testament texts attempting to tempt, corrupt, and even destroy Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, and others.

Satan is the one who lures Noah into drunkenness (Tanh. Noah 13). Satan provoked the Golden Calf incident (Shab. 89a). Satan lured David into a confrontation with

Ishi-benob, the brother of Goliath (Sanh. 45a). These Jewish writings portray Satan as the Death Angel of the Old Testament (B.B. 16a). They also cast him as the Angel of Temptation, Prosecution and Destruction running "sting operations" to destroy men as he did in the book of Job.

In Jubilees 17:16, concerning Abraham's offering of Isaac, the document actually attributes the initiative to kill Isaac to "Prince Mastema," a well-known name for Satan in Jewish lore.

Several Jewish "Sages even speak in the plural of Satanim, as if 'adversaries' were a class of destructive angels...." THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH MYTH, MAGIC AND MYSTICISM, Satan entry, by Rabbi Geoffrey W. Dennis, Llewellyn Publications (2007).

So, IF the Jews came to believe that Satan/Samael was:

--the wrath of God

--the angel of Death

--the Prince of demons and destructive angels

--the Serpent in the Garden

--the source of temptation

--the knowledge of good and evil

--an archangel

--the destroyer of men

--the greatest angel in Heaven

--the chief of all the Satans

--the angel of the Lord who wrestled with Jacob

--the organizing force of evil

--the accuser

--the seducer

...then it appears that God is not the source of wrath at all, but rather that a hostile force opposed to the divine will is the true source and agent of wrath.

This should give us pause.

Here is why.

If even the later Jewish scholars and writers of the Talmud, Midrash, and the Dead Sea Scrolls ALL believed that Satan lurked within the subtext of Old Testament Scripture, then so certainly should we. They had a better differentiated view of the works of God versus the works of Satan. However, they didn't go quite far enough, for they STILL considered Satan an obedient servant angel who operated under the direct commands of God. Satan just did God's "dirty work" under their view. Satan was God's left hand of wrath, his “angry voice,” so to speak.

But, Jesus corrected THIS fatal misconception. Jesus NEVER authenticated Satan as serving His Abba in ANY way, shape, or form. Jesus cast Satan down and out from Heavenly belonging as the "murderer" and "father of lies" from "the beginning," the one whose "lusts" we "commit" when we sin, sins that are "of him" (Satan). Satan is the one to whom Jesus thrice referred as the rebellious "ruler (archon) of this world."

So, Jesus took the evolving Jewish understanding to the final step by revealing Satan as a cosmic rebel totally acting "off the grid" of divine approval or cooperation. Jesus demanded the exegetical re-insertion of Satan into the Old Testament narrative. Until and unless we do this, His Abba will wrongfully be blamed for acts which are unworthy of Him.

Satan is not God's angry voice. Jesus is God's only voice. And that voice has NO cruelty, deception, destruction, oppression, coercion, hostility, or hypocrisy. That voice is Jesus.

Jesus saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven...

Or, put another way, Jesus saw the attributes of Satan drop away from our heavenly image of God.

When His 70 joyful disciples returned after having healed and blessed so many as they declared the kingdom of Heaven was now here, the people

saw...for the first time...the pure...the unadulterated...the Satan-free...image of the Heavenly Abba.

The people SAW.

They saw a love divine without condition, reservation, or limit.

They saw God as a rescuing healer, not a cruel afflicter.

They saw God as a subject of our awe, not our terror.

They saw that Satan was the Old Testament oppressor, not Abba. Abba was richly in the Old Testament, but only as the Father of light, love, and all blessings, in whom there is no darkness, variableness, or shadow of turning.

Jesus knew that wondrous day that Satan's nature had been completely severed and separated from Abba's nature. Satan's attributes of wrath, cruelty, vengeance, oppression, and condemnation had forever been cut, culled away, and discarded as heavenly virtues.

Satan fell from Heaven's image that day. And he is still falling.

Chapter One Hundred Five

What is the vengeance of the Lord?

The answer might shock many.

"Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay." So many quote this passage in cruel, hard, and woeful tones, but ALWAYS omit the next verse so that the full contextual flavor of the passage is never conveyed.

> "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. TO THE CONTRARY, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by

> so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."
>
> Romans 12:19-21

Here is the twist. The purpose of the passage is NOT about threatening ourselves and others with destructive wrath, which is the way the first verse quoted above is mainly used today.

Rather, the passage exhorts us to forsake "destructive wrath" in favor of the Father's "restorative wrath."

The Lord's way of vengeance and wrath is to overcome ALL evil with ALL good-- feeding hungry enemies, giving drink to thirsty enemies, blessing them, praying for them, and forgiving them freely. This dynamic overcomes evil with good by heaping coals of conviction on the enemies' heads so THAT they will thereby repent and enter the kingdom of God's restorative love.

I propose that God's "restorative wrath" and His "restorative love" are one in the same. The DAY OF JUBILEE FORGIVENESS and the DAY OF VENGEANCE are the same thing. God's "day of vengeance" IS His "day of restoration."

Isaiah 61 describes the Lord's "restorative wrath." Where is the widespread and worldwide melting and mauling of the wicked millions here? Rather, does not THIS "day

of vengeance" sound exactly like the "restorative love" of Jubilee?

> "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
> because the LORD has anointed me to bring
> good news to the poor; he has sent me
> to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim
> liberty to the captives, and the opening
> of the prison to those who are bound; to
> proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
> AND THE DAY OF VENGEANCE OF
> OUR GOD ; to comfort all who mourn;
> to grant to those who mourn in Zion-
> to give them a beautiful headdress instead
> of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of
> mourning, the garment of praise instead of
> a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks
> of righteousness, the planting of the LORD,
> that he may be glorified."
>
> Isaiah 61:1-3

There is no violence described above, only full restoration. Loving well IS the best revenge! When Jesus declared that He Himself was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, He actually omitted the words "day of vengeance" from His recitation. Perhaps He knew how that word can be twisted by wrath-mongers of His and didn't want it corrupting His mission statement.

> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
>
> Luke 4:18-19

Sounds good to me!

But could this be true? Is this dynamic elsewhere stated clearly by Jesus? Oh yes!

This was Jesus' central message in the Sermon on the Mount.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.'

But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

> And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one

> who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? YOU THEREFORE be perfect, AS your heavenly Father is perfect."
>
> Matthew 5:38-48

The last verse is key. It instructs us to "THEREFORE" be "PERFECT, even AS the Father is perfect." The "therefore" refers to the previous ten verses in which the Father's perfection is explained. His perfection lies in this-- He loves, blesses, forgives, and restores His enemies!

Am I saying that "the coals of conviction" heaped on the enemies' heads isn't painful? No, coals on the head hurt, and I think nothing is more painful than seeing

the gravity of our own self-centered evil. Am I saying that God's purging flames don't singe, sting, sear, and scorch? No, God's fire is white hot and white holy. But what I am saying, though, is that His fire ultimately saves us by overcoming all of our evil with all of His good. The church father Origen called God's judging flames "wise fire" because they ultimately heal rather than harm. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

The only word in the Gospels for "punishment" with regard to God punishing evildoers is "kolasis," which according to Aristotle, who knew Greek word meanings better than anybody who ever walked the planet, said that "kolasis" is the kind of punishment which "is inflicted in the interest of the sufferer," which means it is for the betterment or improvement of the person being punished. This is contrasted with "timoria," which Aristotle said is the kind of punishment which is "inflicted in the interest of him who inflicts it, that he may obtain satisfaction." (Rhet. 1369b13).

The Gospels reveal a God who never punishes to gratify Himself, but rather punishes to heal and help the evildoers improve and be restored.

William Barclay, who was professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at Glasgow University and the author of many Christian commentaries and books, including a translation of the New Testament and the very popular Daily Study Bible Series, traces the word "kolasis" back,

through Plato, to an original term used to describe the pruning of trees back to allow fuller and healthier growth.

Revenge motives are "timoria," and only gratify the lust for an eye-for-an-eye payback. But "kolasis" motives are always looking for a way to restore and repair that which is lost and broken.

In his Commentary on Matthew 10.2, Origen, my favorite early church father, explained the "the weeping and gnashing of teeth" of those in fiery judgment as a form of repentance and sort of anger of the sinners against themselves, while in the furnace they are being purified. The Lord is the great physician, with His motive for His surgical punishments always being restorative "kolasis." God's modus operandi is always to overcome evil with good. Loving well is the best revenge!

Even the Lord's punishments are healing. His vengeance is His curative virtue. That IS good news!

Chapter One Hundred Six

Are you in the hands of an angry God?

Many people consider Jonathan Edwards' "Sinner's in the Hands of an Angry God" the greatest American sermon of all time.

However, in fact, it's probably the worst sermon ever uttered-- on ANY continent.

Jonathan Edwards' theology was, at times, Calvinism on steroids. This view, on occasion, perverts the nature of God into an omni-causative puppet master who pulls all our strings all of the time. Calvinism's God is a bipolar tyrant who BOTH saves and destroys, BOTH heals and afflicts, BOTH forgives and condemns, and BOTH resurrects and kills. EVERYTHING is from His causative

hand, BOTH good and evil. Every EVENT which occurs happens at God's express approval and command. Satan is merely a dog on God's leash performing the express wrathful commands of God, no more and no less.

In the Old Testament, God appears to order countless men, women and children to be slaughtered (See Deuteronomy 7:1-2; 20:16-17; 32:39-44; Joshua 6:21; 8:24-26; 10:28, 40; 11:11, 14, 20-2). He orders a man executed merely for picking up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:31-36). In fact, certain types of sinners are routinely stoned to death (See Deuteronomy 21:18-21; Leviticus 20:2-5, 27; 24:15-23; Numbers 15:32-26; Deuteronomy 13:1-10; 17:2-7; 22:22). Babies' heads are prayerfully smashed against rocks (Psalm 137:9). Deuteronomy 28:15-68 lists the chamber of horrors which awaits those who dare disobey the "voice of the Lord" -- curses spread over them like cancer, in the city, in the field, at work, in finances, in their children, in sickness, in depression, in defeat, in madness, in blindness and astonishment of heart, in oppression, in poverty, in lack, in frustration, in misery, in lost relationships, in slavery, in want of all things, in hunger, in thirst, in violence, in barren lives, and in "wonderful plagues" in which the Lord "delights" to inflict on those who displease him.

Author Raymond Schwager has famously documented six hundred passages of explicit violence in the Old Testament, one thousand verses where God's direct

punitive violence is described, a hundred passages where Yahweh expressly orders others to kill certain individuals, and several instances where God kills or attempts to kill for no stated reason, such as in Exodus 4:24-26. Combine this with "God" wiping out millions of children and adults in a world-wide flood, "God" killing every first born male child in the vast nation of Egypt, "God" calling down fire from the sky to kill those who reject him, THEN we are left with a monstrous image of God-- one that we SHOULD fear, SHOULD dread, SHOULD hide from, SHOULD obey "or else" face total destruction.

Is it any wonder that the sermon most consider the greatest in American history is Jonathan Edwards' SINNERS IN THE HAND OF AN ANGRY GOD. Consider this excerpt and see if you can imagine Jesus EVER saying anything remotely like this to the crowds He so loved:

Preached at Enfield, July 8th 1741. By Jonathan Edwards, A.M. Pastor of the Church of Christ in Northampton. “Amos ix. 2, 3. Though they dig into Hell, thence shall mine Hand take them ; though they climb up to Heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the Top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence ; and though they be hid from my Sight in the Bottom of the Sea, thence I will command the Serpent, and he shall bite them.

The Bow of God's Wrath is bent, and the Arrow made ready on the String, and Justice bends the Arrow at your Heart, and strains the Bow, and it is nothing but the meer Pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any Promise or Obligation at all, that keeps the Arrow one Moment from being made drunk with your Blood....

The God that holds you over a pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: His wrath toward you burns like fire; He looks upon you as worthy of nothing else but to be cast into the fire; He is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in His sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in His eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended Him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but His hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment....

How awful are those Words, Isai. 63. 3. Which are the Words of the great God, I will tread them in mine Anger, and will trample them in my Fury, and their Blood shall be sprinkled upon my Garments, and I will stain all my Raiment. 'Tis perhaps impossible to conceive of Words that carry in them greater Manifestations of these three Things, viz. Contempt, and Hatred, and fierceness of Indignation. If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful Case, or shewing you the least Regard or Favour, that instead of that he'll only tread you under Foot: And tho' he will know that you

can't bear the Weight of Omnipotence treading upon you, yet he won't regard that, but he will crush you under his Feet without Mercy; he'll crush out your Blood, and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his Garments, so as to stain all his Raiment. He will not only hate you, but he will have you in the utmost Contempt; no Place shall be thought fit for you, but under his Feet, to be trodden down as the Mire of the Streets. O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in....

And you Children that are unconverted, don't you know that you are going down to Hell, to bear the dreadful Wrath of that God that is now angry with you every Day, and every Night? Will you be content to be the Children of the Devil, when so many other Children in the Land are converted, and are become the holy and happy Children of the King of Kings?Jonathan Edwards, July 8, 1741."

Again, can you imagine Jesus EVER talking this way, especially threatening the children as Edwards did here? Jesus calls children to His arms to hug them, not to crush them.

Here is the point. The wrong view of God which the Calvinstic Edwards espoused, that is, one which fails to fully differentiate BETWEEN "God's character and works" AND "Satan's character and works," will ALWAYS result in wrongfully attributing wrath, revenge, cruelty, oppression, sickness and disgust to God.

This is where Edwards' infected view of God corrupted this particular sermon. I have read many wonderful things Jonathan Edwards wrote or said, but this sermon is not one of them. Because it's considered so highly by so many, often being referred to as the greatest American sermon ever, this shows how deep this wrong view of God has infected Western Christianity.

Jonathan Edwards was a great man of God, not BECAUSE of that infamous sermon, but DESPITE IT. Edwards said some wonderful things, but this sermon excerpt was not one of them. I would like to rewrite it with good theology and rename it "Winners in the Hands of an Amorous God!"

Chapter One Hundred Seven

"The Wrath of God" by William Law

"O unhappy Unbelievers, this Mystery of Love compels me in Love, to call upon you, to beseech and entreat you, to look upon the Christian Redemption in this amiable Light. All the Ideas that your own Minds can form of Love and Goodness, must sink into nothing, as soon as compared with God's Love and Goodness in the Redemption of Mankind.

Some People have an Idea, or Notion of the Christian Religion, as if God was thereby declared so full of Wrath against fallen Man, that nothing but the Blood of his only begotten Son could satisfy his Vengeance.

Nay, some have gone such Lengths of Wickedness, as to assert that God had by immutable Decrees reprobated, and rejected a great Part of the Race of Adam, to an inevitable Damnation, to show forth and magnify the Glory of his Justice.

But these are miserable Mistakers of the Divine Nature, and miserable Reproachers of his great Love, and Goodness in the Christian Dispensation.

For God is Love, yea, all Love, and so all Love, that nothing but Love can come from him; and the Christian Religion, is nothing else but an open, full Manifestation of the universal Love towards all Mankind. (See Spirit of Prayer)

As the Light of the Sun has only one common Nature towards all Objects that can receive it, so God has only one common Nature of Goodness towards all created Nature, breaking forth in infinite Flames of Love, upon every Part of the Creation, and calling everything to the highest Happiness it is capable of.

God so loved Man, when his Fall was foreseen, that he chose him to Salvation in Christ Jesus, before the Foundation of the World. When Man was actually fallen, God was so without all Wrath towards him, so full of Love for him, that he sent his only begotten Son into the World to redeem him. Therefore God has no Nature towards Man, but Love, and all that he does to Man, is Love.

There is no Wrath that stands between God and us, but what is awakened in the dark Fire of our own fallen Nature; and to quench this Wrath, and not his own, God gave his only begotten Son to be made Man. God has no more Wrath in himself now, than he had before the Creation, when he had only himself to love. The precious Blood of his Son was not poured out to pacify himself (who in himself had no Nature towards man but Love), but it was poured out, to quench the Wrath, and Fire of the fallen Soul, and kindle in it a Birth of Light, and Love. (See Spirit of Love, part ii, p. 50, &c.)

As man lives, and moves, and has his Being in the Divine Nature, and is supported by it, whether his Nature be good or bad; so the Wrath of Man, which was awakened in the dark Fire of his fallen Nature, may, in a certain Sense, be called the Wrath of God, as Hell itself may be said to be in God, because nothing can be out of his Immensity; yet this Hell, is not God, but the dark Habitation of the Devil. And this Wrath which may be called the Wrath of God, is not God, but the fiery Wrath of the fallen Soul.

And it was solely to quench this Wrath, awakened in the human Soul, that the Blood of the Son of God was necessary, because nothing but a Life and a Birth, derived from him into the human Soul, could change this darkened Root of a self-tormenting Fire, into an amiable Image of the holy Trinity, as it was at first created.

This was the Wrath, Vengeance, and vindictive Justice that wanted to be satisfied, in order to our Salvation; it was the Wrath and Fire of Nature and Creature kindled only in itself, by its departing from due Resignation, and Obedience to God.

When Adam and Eve went trembling behind the Trees, through Fear and Dread of God, it was only this Wrath of God awakened in them; it was a Terror, and Horror, and Shivering of Nature, that arose up in themselves, because the Divine Life, the Birth of the Son of God, which is the Brightness and Joy of the Soul, was departed from it, and had left it, to feel its own poor miserable State without it. And this may well enough be called the Wrath, and Justice of God upon them, because it was a Punishment, or painful State of the Soul, that necessarily followed their revolting from God.

But still there was no Wrath, or painful Sensation, that wanted to be appeased, or satisfied, but in Nature and Creature; it was only the Wrath of fallen Nature, that wanted to be changed, into its first State of Peace and Love. When God spoke to them, he spoke only Love; Adam, where art thou? And he called him, only to comfort him with a promised Redemption, through a Seed of the Woman, a Spark of the word of Life which should reign in him, and his Posterity, till all Enemies were under their Feet. God therefore is all Love, and nothing but Love and Goodness can come from him. He is as far from Anger in himself, as from Pain and Darkness.

But when the fallen Soul of Man, had awakened in itself, a wrathful, self-tormenting Fire, which could never be put out by itself, which could never be relieved by the natural Power of any Creature whatsoever, then the Son of God, by a Love, greater than that which created the World, became Man, and gave his own Blood, and Life into the fallen Soul, that it might through his Life in it, be raised, quickened, and born again into its first State of inward Peace and Delight, Glory and Perfection, never to be lost any more. O inestimable Truths! precious Mysteries, of the Love of God, enough to split the hardest Rock of the most obdurate Heart, that is but able to receive one Glimpse of them! Can the World resists such Love as this? Or can any Man doubt, whether he should open all that is within him, to receive such a Salvation?

O unhappy Unbelievers, this Mystery of Love compels me in Love, to call upon you, to beseech and entreat you, to look upon the Christian Redemption in this amiable Light. All the Ideas that your own Minds can form of Love and Goodness, must sink into nothing, as soon as compared with God's Love and Goodness in the Redemption of Mankind."

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Chapter One Hundred Eight

When did Jesus become God in the early church?

You know, everybody is free to believe what they choose about the deity of Christ. "Think and let think," as Wesley said.

But what they AREN'T entitled to do (at least without significant blowback) is to make sweeping claims about the church fathers which are demonstrably false.

And one such claim making the rounds right now is that NO Christians ever claimed that Jesus was God for the first 400 years AD.

I can't think of anything LESS true than this jaw-dropping claim.

Jesus as God was profusely preached and proclaimed by the early Church.

Here are a few (and by few I mean many) examples.

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians AD 107

Introduction: "…being united and elected through the true passion by the will of the Father, and Jesus Christ, our God (Ho Theos): Abundant happiness through Jesus Christ, and His undefiled grace."

Chapter 7: "There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and Spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and God; first passible and then impassible — even Jesus Christ our Lord."

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to Polycarp, AD 107

Chapter 3: "Be on the alert for him who is above time, the Timeless, the Unseen, the One who became visible for our sakes, who was beyond touch and passion, yet who for our sakes became subject to suffering, and endured everything for us."

Mathetes, Epistle to Diognetus AD 130

Chapter 7: "Truly God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. He did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who bear sway over earthly things, or one of those to whom the government of things in the heavens has been entrusted, but the very Creator and Fashioner of all things — by whom He made the heavens — by whom he enclosed the sea within its proper bounds — whose ordinances all the stars faithfully observe — from whom the sun has received the measure of his daily course to be observed."

Epistle of Barnabus, AD 100

Chapter 5: "There is yet this also, my brethren; if the Lord endured to suffer for our souls, though He was Lord of the whole world, unto whom God said from the foundation of the world, Let us make man after our image and likeness, how then did He endure to suffer at the hand of men?"

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, AD 160

Chapter 48 Trypho: "For when you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man, yet that He is not man of man, this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish."

Justin: "I know that the statement does appear to be paradoxical, especially to those of your race, who are ever unwilling to understand or to perform the [requirements] of God, but [ready to perform] those of your teachers, as God Himself declares. Now assuredly, Trypho, [the proof] that this man is the Christ of God does not fail, though I be unable to prove that He existed formerly as Son of the Maker of all things, being God, and was born a man by the Virgin."

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, AD 180

Chapter 3: "As it has been clearly demonstrated that the Word, who existed in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind, was in these last days, according to the time appointed by the Father, united to His own workmanship, inasmuch as He became a man liable to suffering, [it follows] that every objection is set aside of those who say, "If our Lord was born at that time,

Christ had therefore no previous existence." For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning; but when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam — namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God — that we might recover in Christ Jesus."

Caius, Against Artemon AD 210

"For they say that all those of the first age, and the apostles themselves, both received and taught those things which these men now maintain; and that the truth of Gospel preaching was preserved until the times of Victor, who was the thirteenth bishop in Rome from Peter, and that from his successor Zephyrinus the truth was falsified. And perhaps what they allege might be credible, did not the Holy Scriptures, in the first place, contradict them. And then, besides, there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of Victor, which they wrote against the heathen in defense of the truth, and against the heresies of their time: I mean Justin and Miltiades, and Tatian and Clement, and many others, in all which divinity is ascribed to Christ. For who is ignorant of the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the rest, which declare Christ to be God and man? All the psalms, too, and hymns of brethren, which have been written from

the beginning by the faithful, celebrate Christ the Word of God, ascribing divinity to Him."

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians AD 107

Chapter 19: "Hence every kind of magic was destroyed, and every bond of wickedness disappeared; ignorance was removed, and the old kingdom abolished, God Himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life."

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans, Ad 107

"Introduction: Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which has obtained mercy, through the majesty of the Most High Father, and Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son; the Church which is beloved and enlightened by the will of Him that wills all things which are according to the love of Jesus Christ our God… I wish an abundance of happiness unblameably, in Jesus Christ our God."

Justin Martyr, Second Apology to the Roman Senate, AD 161

Chapter 6: "And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word, who also was with Him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering all things through Him; this name itself also containing an unknown significance; as also the appellation "God" is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained. But "Jesus," His name as man and Saviour, has also significance. For He was made man also, as we before said, having been conceived according to the will of God the Father, for the sake of believing men, and for the destruction of the demons."

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, AD 160

Chapter 36 (Justin): "As you wish, Trypho, I shall come to these proofs which you seek in the fitting place; but now you will permit me first to recount the prophecies, which I wish to do in order to prove that Christ is called both God and Lord of hosts."

Trypho: (In response): "For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to

them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped."

Chapter 63: "Therefore, these words testify explicitly that He is witnessed to by Him who established these things, as deserving to be worshipped, as God and as Christ."

Novatian, Treatise on the Trinity, AD 260

Chapter 13: After quoting from John 1:1, 1:3, 1:14, 3:13, 10:30, 17:5, 20:28, Rev 19:13, Ps 45:1, 19:6-7, Col 1:16, Rom 9:5, Gal 1:1 and 12, He concludes:

"Therefore, He is not man only, but God also, since all things are by Him; so that we reasonably ought to understand that Christ is not man only, who is subsequent to all things, but God also, since by Him all things were made. For how can you say that He is man only, when you see Him also in the flesh, unless because when both aspects are considered, both truths are rightly believed?"

Chapter 25: "Therefore, say they, if Christ is not man only, but God also — and Scripture tells us that He died for us, and was raised again — then Scripture teaches us to believe that God died; or if God does not die, and Christ is said to have died, then Christ will not be God, because God cannot be admitted to have died. If they ever could understand or had understood what they read, they

would never speak after such a perilous fashion. But the folly of error is always hasty in its descent, and it is no new thing if those who have forsaken the lawful faith descend even to perilous results. For if Scripture were to set forth that Christ is God only, and that there was no association of human weakness mingled in His nature, this intricate argument of theirs might reasonably avail something. If Christ is God, and Christ died, then God died. But when Scripture determines, as we have frequently shown, that He is not only God, but man also, it follows that what is immortal may be held to have remained uncorrupted. For who cannot understand that the divinity is impassible, although the human weakness is liable to suffering? When, therefore, Christ is understood to be mingled and associated as well of that which God is, as of that which man is — for the Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us— who cannot easily apprehend of himself, without any teacher and interpreter, that it was not that in Christ that died which is God, but that in Him died which is man? For what if the divinity in Christ does not die, but the substance of the flesh only is destroyed, when in other men also, who are not flesh only, but flesh and soul, the flesh indeed alone suffers the inroads of wasting and death, while the soul is seen to be uncorrupted, and beyond the laws of destruction and death?"

Tertullian, Against Praexas AD 200

Chapter 25: "What follows Philip's question, and the Lord's whole treatment of it, to the end of John's Gospel, continues to furnish us with statements of the same kind, distinguishing the Father and the Son, with the properties of each. Then there is the Paraclete or Comforter, also, which He promises to pray for to the Father, and to send from heaven after He had ascended to the Father. He is called another Comforter, indeed; John 14:16 but in what way He is another we have already shown, He shall receive of mine, says Christ, John 16:14 just as Christ Himself received of the Father's. Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, I and my Father are One, John 10:30 in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number."

Melito of Sardis, Paschal Homily AD 165

"And who has been murdered? Who is the murderer? I am reluctant to tell, but I am constrained to say. For if the murder had taken place by night, or if the slaughter had occurred in a desert place, it would be easy to keep silent. But now, in the midst of the street and the town, in the midst of the city, in full view of all, the Just One has been unjustly murdered.

And so he has been hoisted on a cross and a title added, indicating he was slaughtered. Who was he? To say it is hard, but not to say it more dreadful still. Only hear it trembling on whose account the earth trembled. He who suspended the earth is himself suspended; he who fixed the heavens is himself transfixed; he who made all things fast is made fast upon the tree. The Master has been outraged. God has been slaughtered. The King of Israel has been slain by Israel's right hand."

"Divinity of the Son: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1.

"I and My Father are one." John 10:30.

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? John 14:9.

"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" John 20:28.

"But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You." Heb. 1:8, 9.

"He is Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, 'Let us make man after our

image, and after our likeness." Barnabas (c. 70–130, E), 1.139.

Clement of Rome

"Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us." Clement of Rome (c. 96, W), 1.11."

Ignatius

"God Himself was manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life." Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.58.

"Continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ, our God." Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.68.

"I pray for your happiness forever in our God, Jesus Christ." Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.96.

"The Christians trace the beginning of their religion to Jesus the Messiah. He is called the Son of the Most High God. It is said that God came down from heaven. He assumed flesh and clothed Himself with it from a Hebrew virgin. And the Son of God lived in a daughter of man." Aristides (c. 125, E), 9.265.

"Truly God Himself, who is Almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed among men, the One who is the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word. . . . God did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, angel, or ruler.

. . . Rather, He sent the very Creator and Fashioner of all things—by whom He made the heavens. . . . As a king sends his Son, who is also a king, so God sent Him. He sent Him as God." Letter to Diognetus (c. 125–200), 1.27.

"Brethren, it is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God—as the Judge of the living and the dead." Second Clement (c. 150), 7.517.

Justin Martyr

"We reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.166.

"The Word, . . . He is Divine." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.166.

"The Father of the universe has a Son. And He, being the First-Begotten Word of God, is even God." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.184.

"Next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbeggoten and ineffable God." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.193.

"For Christ is King, Priest, God, Lord, Angel, and Man." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.211.

(TRYPHO, A JEW): "You utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.213.

"Moses . . . declares that He who appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre is God. He was sent with the two angels in His company to judge Sodom by another One, who remains ever in the supercelestial places, invisible to all men, holding personal contact with no one. We believe this other One to be the Maker and Father of all things. . . . Yet, there is said to be another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things. And He is also called an Angel, because he announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.223.

"He deserves to be worshipped as God and as Christ." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.229.

"David predicted that He would be born from the womb before the sun and moon, according to the Father's will. He made Him known, being Christ, as God, strong and to be worshipped." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.237.

"The Son ministered to the will of the Father. Yet, nevertheless, He is God, in that He is the First-Begotten of all creatures." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.262.

"If you had understood what has been written by the prophets, you would not have denied that He was God, Son of the Only, Unbegotten, Unutterable God." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.263.

"Rejoice, O you heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship Him" [Deut. 32:43]. Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.264.

"He is forever the first in power. For Christ, being the First-Born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by Himself through water, faith, and wood." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.268.

Melito

"Then did the whole creation see clearly that for man's sake the Judge was condemned, and the Invisible was seen, and the Illimitable was circumscribed, and the Impassible suffered, and the Immortal died, and the Celestial was laid in the grave." Melito (c. 170, E), 8.756.

"God was put to death, the King of Israel slain!" Melito (c. 170, E), 8.758.

Athenagoras

"There is the one God and the Logos proceeding from Him, the Son. We understand that the Son is inseparable from Him." Athenagoras (c. 175, E), 2.137.

Theophilus

"God by His own Word and Wisdom made all things." Theophilus (c. 180, E), 2.91.

Irenaeus

"'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of Your kingdom is a right scepter. You have loved righteousness and hated iniquity. Therefore, God, Your God, has anointed You.' For the Spirit designates by the name of God—both Him who is anointed as Son, and He who anoints, that is, the Father. And again, 'God stood in the congregation of the gods; He judges among the gods.' Here he refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.419.

"For He fulfills the bountiful and comprehensive will of His Father, inasmuch as He is Himself the Savior of those who are saved, and the Lord of those who are under authority, and the God of all those things that have been formed, the Only-Begotten of the Father." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.443.

"I have shown from the Scriptures that none of the sons of Adam are, absolutely and as to everything, called God, or named Lord. But Jesus is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, Lord, King Eternal,

and the Incarnate Word. . . . He is the Holy Lord, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Beautiful in appearance, and the Mighty God." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.449.

"Thus He indicates in clear terms that He is God, and that His advent was in Bethlehem. . . . God, then, was made man, and the Lord did Himself save us."I renaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.451.

"He is God, for the name Emmanuel indicates this." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.452.

"Christ Himself, therefore, together with the Father, is the God of the living, who spoke to Moses, and who was also manifested to the fathers." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.467.

"Now the father of the human race is the Word of God." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.505.

"How can they be saved unless it was God who worked out their salvation upon earth? Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has first passed into man." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.507.

"It is plain that He was Himself the Word of God, who was made the Son of man. He received from the Father the power of remission of sins. He was man, and He was God. This was so that since as man He suffered for us, so as God He might have compassion on us." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.545.

Clement of Alexandria

"He is God in the form of man, stainless, the minister of His Father's will, the Word who is God, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand. And with the form of God, He is God." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.210.

"There is a suggestion of the divinity of the Lord in [Isaac's] not being slain. Jesus rose again after His burial, having suffered no harm—just like Isaac was released from being sacrificed." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.

"O the great God! O the perfect child! The Son in the Father and the Father in the Son. . . . God the Word, who became man for our sakes." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.

"The Father of all is alone perfect, for the Son is in Him and the Father is in the Son." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.222.

"Our Instructor is the holy God Jesus, the Word." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.223.

"Nothing, then, is hated by God, nor yet by the Word. For both are one—that is, God. For He has said, 'In the beginning the Word was in God, and the Word was God.'" Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.225.

"He who has the Almighty God, the Word, is in want of nothing." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.281.

"Pointing to the First-Begotten Son, Peter writes, accurately comprehending the statement, 'In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth." And He is called Wisdom by all the prophets. This is He who is the Teacher of all created beings. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.493.

"The best thing on earth is the most pious man. The best thing in heaven, the nearer in place and purer, is an angel, the partaker of the eternal and blessed life. But the nature of the Son, which is nearest to Him who is alone the Almighty One, is the most perfect, most holy, most potent, most princely, most kingly, and most beneficent. This is the highest excellence, who orders all things in accordance with the Father's will and holds the helm of the universe in the best way. . . . The Son of God is never displaced . . . being always everywhere and being contained nowhere. He is complete mind, complete paternal light. He is all eyes, seeing all things, hearing all things, knowing all things. . . . All the host of angels and gods are placed in subjection to Him. He, the paternal Word, exhibits the holy administration for Him who put [all things] in subjection to Him." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.524.

"The Son is the cause of all good things, by the will of the Almighty Father." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.525.

"He is the true Only-Begotten, the express image of the glory of the universal King and Almighty Father, who impresses on the man of God the seal of the perfect contemplation, according to His own image. So that there is now a third divine image, made as far as possible like the Second Cause, the Essential Life." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.527.

Tertullian

"Nor do we differ from the Jews concerning God. We must make, therefore, a remark or two as to Christ's divinity." Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.34.

"Search, then, and see if the divinity of Christ is true. Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.36. To all He is equal, to all King, to all Judge, to all God and Lord."Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.158.

"Christ's name is extending everywhere, believed everywhere, worshipped by all the above-enumerated nations, reigning everywhere. Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.158. This opens the ears of Christ our God." Tertullian (c. 200, W), 3.715.

"We who believe that God really lived on earth, and took upon Him the low estate of human form, for the purpose

of man's salvation, are very far from thinking as those do who refuse to believe that God cares for anything. . . . Fortunately, however, it is a part of the creed of Christians even to believe that God did die, and yet that He is alive forevermore." Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.309.

"Christ is received in the person of Christ, because even in this manner is He our God." Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.319.

"He is not on this account to be regarded as an angel—as a Gabriel or a Michael. . . . Since He is the Spirit of God and the Power of the Highest, can He be regarded as lower than the angels? He who is truly God and the Son of God? Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.534. For so did the Father previously say to the Son: 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.'"Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.549.

"Having been made man, He is still God forever. For to this effect, John also has said, "Who is, and who was, and who is to come—the Almighty." And he has appropriately called Christ "the Almighty." For in this, he has said only what Christ testifies of Himself. For Christ gave this testimony and said, "All things are delivered unto me by my Father." Hippolytus (c. 205, W), 5.225.

Origen

"Besides, there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of Victor, which they wrote against the

pagans in defense of the truth and against the heresies of their day. . . . For who is ignorant of the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the rest, which declare Christ to be God and man? All the psalms, too, and hymns of brethren—which have been written from the beginning by the faithful—celebrate Christ the Word of God, ascribing divinity to Him. Eusebius, quoting Caius (c. 215, W), 5.601. No one should be offended that the Savior is also God, seeing God is the Father. Likewise, since the Father is called Omnipotent, no one should be offended that the Son of God is also called Omnipotent. For in this way, the words understand Him as existing in those narrow limits in which He was once confined for our sakes. He is not in that circumscribed body that He occupied on earth, when dwelling among men—according to which He might be considered as enclosed in one particular place." Origen (c. 225, E), 4.299.

"Every beginning of those families that have a relation to God as to the Father of all, took its beginning lower down with Christ, who is next to the God and Father of all, being thus the Father of every soul, as Adam is the father of all men." Origen (c. 225, E), 4.370, 371.

"No one will logically think this Son of God, in respect of the Word being God, is to be contained in any place. . . . For it is absurd to say that Christ was in Peter and in Paul, but not in Michael the archangel, nor in Gabriel. And from this, it is distinctly shown that the divinity of

the Son of God was not shut up in some place." Origen (c. 225, E), 4.377.

"We might say of Christ, that by nature His first principle [Gr. arche] is deity. However, in relation to us, who cannot comprehend the whole truth about Him because of its very greatness, His first principle is His manhood." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.307.

"If it is permitted to say this, I consider that the beginning of real existence was the Son of God, who says, "I am the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." . . . Now, God is altogether one and simple. But, for many reasons, our Savior is made many things—since God set Him forth as a propitiation and a first fruits of the whole creation. . . . The whole creation, so far as it is capable of redemption, stands in need of Him." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.308.

"Should anyone inquire whether all that the Father knows . . . is known to our Savior also, and should he—imagining that he will thereby glorify the Father—show that some things known to the Father are unknown to the Son. . . we must remind him that it is from His being the truth that He is Savior. Accordingly, if He is the complete truth, then there is nothing true that He does not know. Truth must not limp for the want of the things that—according to these persons—are known to the Father only."Origen (c. 228, E), 9.313.

"One cannot be in the Father or with the Father except by ascending upwards from below and first coming to the divinity of the Son—through which one may be led by the hand and brought to the blessedness of the Father himself." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.313.

"The arrangement of the sentences seem to indicate an order. First we have, "In the beginning was the Word." Next, "And the Word was with God." And thirdly, "And the Word was God." It was arranged this way so that it might be seen that it is the Word's being with God that makes Him God." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.323.

"He is said to have a name written that no one knows but He Himself. For there are some things that are known to the Word alone. For the beings that come into existence after Him have a poorer nature than His." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.327.

"The Canaanite woman came and worshipped Jesus as God, saying, "Lord help me." Origen (c. 245, E), 9.446.

"He is perceived as being the Word, for He was God in the beginning with God. He reveals the Father." Origen (c. 245, E), 9.452.

"We now believe Jesus Himself, when He speaks respecting his divinity: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.426.

"The Gospels do not consider Him who in Jesus said these words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," to have been of so circumscribed a nature so as to have had an existence nowhere out of the soul and body of Jesus. . . . Jesus himself, in raising the minds of His disciples to higher thoughts of the Son of God, says: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of you." . . . We quote these passages, making no distinction between the Son of God and Jesus." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.434.

"The divinity of Jesus is established by these things: the existence of the churches of the saved, the prophecies uttered concerning Him, the cures brought about in His name, and the Wisdom and knowledge that are in Him. Origen (c. 248, E), 4.477. The Word that was in the beginning with God (who is also very God) may come to us." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.499.

"Every prayer, supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving is to be sent up to the Supreme God through the High Priest—the living Word and God, who is above all the angels. And to the Word himself will we also pray, make intercessions, and offer thanksgiving." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.544.

"Although we may call him a second God, let men know that by the term, "second God," we mean nothing else than a Virtue capable of including all other virtues, and a

Reason capable of containing all reason." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.561.

"These are not the words of Christians. Rather, they are of those who are altogether alienated from salvation and who neither acknowledge Jesus as Savior, nor God, nor Teacher, nor Son of God." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.587.

"The architect of this world is the Son of God. His Father is the first God and Sovereign Ruler over all things." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.595.

"The people who sat in darkness (the Gentiles) saw a great light"—the God Jesus." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.603.

"If the same question is put to us in regard to the worship of Jesus, we will show that the right to be honored was given to Him by God, so that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." For the prophecies that preceded His birth were preparations for His worship." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.642.

(CELSUS SAYS): "If these people worshipped one God alone and no other, they would perhaps have some valid argument against the worship of others. But they pay excessive reverence to one who has but lately appeared among men. And they think it is no offense against God if they worship His servant also." To this, we reply that if Celsus had known that saying, "I and My Father are one," and the words used in prayer by the Son of God, "As you and I are one," he would not have thought that

we worship any others besides Him who is the Supreme God. For he says, "My Father is in Me and I in Him." . . . However, from these words, someone may be afraid of my joining those who deny that the Father and the Son are two persons. If so, let him weigh the following passage: "And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and of one soul," so he may understand the meaning of the saying, "I and My Father are one." We therefore worship one God—the Father and the Son—as I have explained. So our argument against the worship of other gods still continues valid. And we do not "reverence beyond measure one who has but lately appeared," as though He did not exist before. For we believe Him when He says, "Before Abraham was, I am.". . . We worship, therefore, the Father of truth and the Son, who is the truth. And although they are two Persons or Beings, they are one in unity of thought, harmony, and identity of will. So entirely are they one that he who has seen the Son. . . has seen in Him (who is the image of God) God Himself. . . . Accordingly, we worship with all our power the one God and His only Son—the Word and the image of God—by prayers and supplications. And we offer our petitions to the God of the universe through His Only-Begotten Son. To the Son, we first present them, and beseech Him, as "the propitiation for our sins," and our High Priest, to offer our desires, sacrifices, and prayers to the Most High. Our faith, therefore, is directed to God through His Son." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.643, 644.

"To explain this fully, and to justify the conduct of the Christians in refusing homage to any object except the Most High God and the First-Born of all creation (who is His Word and is God), we must quote this from Scripture." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.639.

"We sing hymns to the Most High alone and to his Only-Begotten, who is the Word and God." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.665.

"Why, then, should man hesitate to call Christ "God," when he observes that He is declared to be God by the Father, according to the Scriptures? . . . Reasonably, then, whoever acknowledges Him to be God may find salvation in Christ as God. Whoever does not acknowledge Him to be God will lose salvation that he could not find elsewhere than in Christ as God." Novatian (c. 235, W), 5.621.

Novatian

"In what way do they [the heretics] receive Christ as God? For now they cannot deny Him to be God. Do they receive Him as God the Father or God the Son? If as the Son, why do they deny that the Son of God is God? If as the Father, why do they not follow those who appear to maintain blasphemies of that kind?" Novatian (c. 235, W), 5.621.

"This saying can be true of no man: 'I and the Father are one." Christ alone declared this utterance out of the consciousness of His divinity. Finally, the apostle Thomas, instructed in all the proofs and conditions of Christ's divinity, says in reply to Christ, "My Lord and my God." Besides, the Apostle Paul says, "... of whom Christ came according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever." Novatian (c. 235, W), 5.622.

Chapter One Hundred Nine

What about God's sovereignty?

IF every terrible thought, abusive act, destructive deed, and cruel circumstance occurs because the Lord, in His ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY, ordains it to occur, then NOTHING has been UNCOUPLED from His will, NOTHING that occurs is OTHER than His will, NOTHING can RESIST His will, NOTHING can DELAY His will, NOTHING can FRUSTRATE His will.... not for a millisecond.

All that happens is the Lord's will running smoothly and sovereignly down the yellow brick road to heaven.

Soooooooooo....

Child abuse occurs just as perfectly ordained by the Lord...

Child rape occurs just as the Lord's irresistible and terrible will decrees...

Sexual assault, murder, robbery, terrorism, school shootings, all are the Lord's will...

Cancers, tsunamis, earthquakes, wars, plagues, famines, genocides all are the Lord's sculpting tools He uses to teach us humility and repentance.

We know this, for, as the leading Calvinist spokesman today, John Piper, repeatedly says, God wills these destructive evils to teach his people to fear God. His permissions ARE His purposes. As Piper told his own daughter, God could stop all these types of disasters with a wave of His little pinky if He wanted to, but since He doesn't, it is His good and perfect will that these things happen when they happen, how they happen, and that they happen.

There is no other will in the cosmos. Just God's. We may think we have a will, but we don't. We are merely thinking what God has ordained us to think.

Had enough yet?

And if you think I am I misstating the issue, let me share some quotes from John Calvin and his theological followers.

Consider Calvin's claim: "that thieves, murderers, and other evildoers, are instruments of divine providence, being employed by the Lord himself to execute the judgments which He has resolved to inflict." Institutes I, 17, 5.

Consider Calvin again: "The devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as He permits, nay, unless in so far as He COMMANDS; that they are not only bound by His fetters but are even forced to do Him service." Institutes I, 17, 11.

Thus, according to Calvinism, God was judging the victims of 9/11 using the evil terrorists as His instruments of divine will. The terrorists only did what God COMMANDED them to do according to His divine purposes. God FORCED the terrorists to slit the pilots' throats from ear-to-ear before ramming their planes into both towers and killing thousands. Osama Bin Laden was God's SERVANT in all this horror.

Calvinism outrageously claims that all evil which Satan conceives is solely at God's command and initiative. Calvin WAS intellectually honest enough to admit there was no difference in his theology between God causing evil and God allowing evil. God's "permissions ARE His

purposes," Calvinist John Piper claims in his blog cited below. God puts His necessary STAMP OF APPROVAL on EVERY SINGLE rape, molestation, murder, disaster, war, cancer, amputation, famine, plague and horror which ever befalls us. As Calvin said, "All events take place by God's sovereign appointment." Institutes, III, 23, 6.

Calvinism says that even though Satan entered Judas' heart to get him to betray Jesus, God had to first enter Satan's heart to THEN compel the devil to enter Judas. THIS IS INSANE! If God does all this, who needs Satan to begin with? But, Piper says you better believe this or else. In fact, during a teaching which is posted on YouTube under the title "Why does God allow Satan to live?" at around the 3 minute mark, Piper says that those who ultimately refuse to believe as he does, that God specifically regulates and ordains ALL evil events, reject the Biblical testimony and will themselves end up perishing forever in Hell.

Jesus made it very clear that when destructions come, our attitude should be, "An enemy has done this!" Matthew 13.28. This should always be our view of things when disasters wreak their havoc---- that Satan is the responsible killing agent, NOT God.

But, tragically, many continue violate this dynamic truth on a daily basis. Enter theologian John Piper of, one of Calvin's most outspoken supporters, who frequently

models WRATH-INFESTED distortions about God's nature and character. Consider this quote from John Piper as to what he would minister to the devastated children victimized in the wake of the Twin Towers disaster of 9/11:

"I'm coming to those families and I'm saying when they ask me, 'Do you think God ordained the death of my daddy?' I say, 'Yes. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.... But the very power by which GOD GOVERNS ALL EVILS enables Him to govern your life.... Where would we turn if we didn't have a God to help us deal with the very evils that He has ordained come into our lives?'"

This above quote is from Piper's book Desiring God. Piper goes on to say that since even the wind obeys Jesus, He could have "easily blown those planes off course by a little puff of wind, and He didn't do it. Therefore God was right there, ordaining that this happen, because He could have stopped it, just like that."

Now listen to Piper's bog where he recounts a conversation he had with his own 11 year old daughter in the wake of a local bridge collapse where 13 people were killed:

"We prayed during our family devotions. Talitha (11 years old) and Noel and I prayed earnestly for the families affected by the calamity and for the others in our city.

Talitha prayed, 'Please don't let anyone blame God for this but give thanks that they were saved.'

When I sat on her bed and tucked her in and blessed her and sang over her a few minutes ago, I said, 'You know Talitha, that was a good prayer because when people 'blame' God for something, they are angry with Him, and they are saying He has done something wrong. That's what blame means: accuse somebody of wrongdoing. BUT you and I know that God did not do anything wrong. God always does what is wise. And you know that God could have held up that bridge with one hand.' Talitha said, 'Yes, with His pinky.' 'Yes,' I said 'with his pinky. Which means that God had a purpose for not holding up that bridge, knowing all that would happen, and He is infinitely wise in all that he wills.

Talitha said, 'Maybe he let it fall because he WANTED all the people of Minneapolis to FEAR Him. 'Yes, Talitha,' I said, ' I am sure that is one of the reasons God let the bridge fall.' I sang to her the song I always sing:

Come rest your head and nestle gently

And do not fear the dark of night.

Almighty God keeps watch intently

And guards your life with all his might.

Doubt not his love, nor power to keep,

He never fails, nor does He sleep.

I said, 'You know Talitha, that is true whether you die in a bridge collapse, or in a car accident, or from cancer, or terrorism, or old age. God always keeps you, even when you die. So you don't need to be afraid, do you?' 'No,' she shook her head. I leaned down and kissed her. 'Good night. I love you.'"

—Desiring God blog, August 1, 2007, by John Piper.

This is entirely consistent with Piper's views on tornadoes, tsunamis and earthquakes. See Piper's Desiring God blog entitled "Japan: After Empathy and Aid, People Want Answers." He believes earthquakes are from God, never Satan, because the earthquakes in the Bible are from God. Piper depicts the earthquake and tsunami which devastated Japan in March of 2011 as,"God's unilateral taking of thousands of lives."

Piper famously claimed that God sent a tornado to warn the Lutherans not to accept gay clergy. As Greg Boyd noted in his rebuttal on this claim, Piper would have us believe that God caused this tornado to skip over sex-slave houses, abortion clinics, other churches guilty of greed, hypocrisy and apathy toward the poor, just to damage a steeple on a church where people were struggling with issues related to homosexuality.

Piper teaches, following his mentors John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, that God ordains evil so that people

will glorify Him. God's purpose for evil, then, is self-glorification. It is a way of displaying His glory as He dispenses wrath and justice upon the earth by allowing certain people to suffer and die horribly for the evil He put in their hearts to do in the first place.

Piper again on his blog. "It's right for God to slaughter women and children anytime he pleases. God gives life and he takes life. Everybody who dies, dies because God wills that they die. God is taking life every day. He will take 50,000 lives today. Life is in God's hand. God decides when your last heartbeat will be, and whether it ends through cancer or a bullet wound. God governs. So God is God! He rules and governs everything. And everything he does is just and right and good. God owes us nothing." —John Piper.

So, lets extend this thinking out a bit. If "absolutely everything" is in God's hands and "absolutely nothing" is in our hands,

then.....

then.....

then..... we serve a cruel puppet master.

No other way around it. If everything that IS, everything that OCCURS, everything that COMES, whether good or evil..... is FROM the Lord, then He is solely

responsible for all sin, all crime, all terrorism, all all sickness, all disasters, and all famines.

If we can only THINK what the Lord ALLOWS us to think, only DO what the Lord PERMITS us to do, and only EXPERIENCE what the Lord COMMANDS us to experience....

-- then any measure of freewill is a sham

-- then faith and love is a sham

-- then God is the author of evil

-- then God is dualistic in nature, wrathfully killing with His left and tenderly forgiving with His right

-- then God's hand is in the the puppet-head called Satan

It just can't be. What I sickeningly describe above is called MONERGY. Don't buy into it.

"As R.C. Sproul explains it, in CHOSEN BY GOD, "A monergistic work is a work produced singly, by one person… A synergistic work is one that involves cooperation between two or more persons or things." Under that definition, by one of the leading Calvinistic thinkers today, my definition and application is warranted.

It may be true that some progressive Calvinists apply monergy to JUST regeneration, and that it may well be that regeneration is the area of theology where that term

is most frequently used, it is beyond dispute by any who have actually studied Calvinism that Calvin's ENTIRE and ORIGINAL theological system form the Institutes is based on monergism, not just in regeneration, not just in predestination, not just in theodicy, not just in prayer, not just in cosmology, but in all spheres of human and divine activity.

Again and again...the Monergistic mentality essentially sets up the relationship between God and man (as well as grace and nature) like two transactions in a zero-sum game. In a zero-sum game, the gains of one side will always correlate to the losses of the other side. So for example, the Monergistic mentality feels that if too much freedom or efficacy is granted to man or nature then there is that much less left over for God's own freedom, sovereignty or glory. What results is partly analogous to the kind of Apollinarian dualism discussed by Colin Gunton in Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology or again by Demetrios Bathrellos in The Byzantine Christ. The Apollinarians 'could not conceive of a coexistence and cooperation between the divine and the human natures and wills in Christ that would respect the particularity and integrity of both' (Bathrellos, p. 15). The Apollinarian discomfort preserving the particularity and integrity of the human is echoed again and again in Calvinist treatments of the relationship between the human and the divine. For example, in James White's book Debating Calvinism, he

argues that 'the first element of the Bible's teaching of monergism is the absolute freedom of God.' FOR GOD TO BE TRULY FREE, HE MUST BE THE ONLY ENERGY OPERATING.

Similarly, in R.C. Sproul's classic Chosen by God, Sproul goes so far as to assert that anything short of total Monergism leaves God less than God. On this scheme of things, Monergism is not merely true, it is true necessarily, for it is no more possible for God to create a non-monergistic universe than it is possible for Him to cease being God. Ironically, this is meant to free God, although it actually ends up significantly limiting Him. For as David Bradshaw observed, 'on this view the Augustinian interpretation of predestination is not only true but is necessarily true, since God could not create creatures who are capable in any way of affecting his judgments regarding salvation and damnation. Yet the Augustinian position began precisely as the attempt to exalt the divine will over all necessity…. It is problems such as these that led Pascal to exclaim that the God of the philosophers is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Augustinian-Thomistic God, who is perfectly simple and fully actual, seems to be locked within a box from which he cannot escape in order to interact in any meaningful way with his creatures....'

This Monergistic approach to prayer permeates countless books and articles by Calvinist authors when handling the topic of prayer. For example, in Arthur Pink's discussion

of prayer in his book The Sovereignty of God, he takes violent exception to an article on prayer where the author had declared that 'prayer changes things, meaning that God changes things when men pray.' Calvinist Joseph Wilson argued similarly in his 1991 article 'Does Prayer Change Things?' He wrote, 'No man can believe in the glorious, Biblical doctrine of absolute predestination, and believe that prayer changes things. The two are incompatible. They do not go together. If one is true, the other is false. Since predestination is true, it follows as night follows day, that prayer does not change things.' Calvinist David West made the same point, 'Prayer does not change things, nor does it change God or His mind.' Similarly Calvinist Dan Phillips commented, 'prayer does not change things.'"

Former Calvinist Robin Phillips, Ancient Faith Ministries Blog, January 22, 2014.

What's interesting is that the early Fathers up until Augustine did not have this monergistic mindset. "The earlier church fathers…taught that salvation was through Christ; yet they assumed that man had full power to accept or reject the gospel…They taught a kind of synergism in which there was co-operation between grace and free will." Calvinist theologian Loraine Boettner, The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination, 365.

In other words, the early pre-Augustinian fathers were synergists, not monergists. And I think they had it absolutely right.

So, to review, MONERGY say it's ALL in God's hands. Nothing is in OUR hands. We just follow our pre-programming. Therefore God is the SOLE cause of all that occurs, be it wondrous good or the vilest evil.

SYNERGY, by contrast, disagrees and instead says that some thin slice of consent is needed here on earth by us in order to release God's will to full manifestation upon the earth. It takes two to tango. We are called to dance with the Lord, not to stand there like a limp, wet noodle.

"Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall be awed, and be enlarged." Is. 60:5. We all must learn to join the dance of SYNERGY!

Chapter One Hundred Ten

Can someone be saved after death?

Do Scriptures teach that souls can be saved and reconciled to God even AFTER their death?

Yes, I think so. His kindness certainly extends past our earthly lives.

“Blessed be he of the Lord, who has not forsaken His kindness to the living and the dead!” Ruth 2:20.

“We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.” - 2 Samuel 14:14.

“ALL shall know the Lord, from the least of them to the greatest of them." (Heb. 8:11).

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw ALL MANKIND unto Myself." (John 12:32).

“For as in Adam ALL die, even so in Christ shall ALL be made alive.... And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be ALL in ALL." (1 Corinthians 15:22, 28).

“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that AT THE NAME OF JESUS EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:10:11).

“EVERY CREATURE which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever." (Rev. 5:13).

So does “every” and “all” in the below passage indeed mean “every” and “all” OR does the context dizzyingly demand it be treated as “nary” and “few.”

Decide for yourself.

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another builds thereon. But let every man take heed how he builds thereupon. For no other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; ***EVERY MAN'S*** WORK shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be REVEALED BY FIRE; and THE FIRE SHALL TRY ***EVERY MAN'S*** WORK, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he has built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. IF ***ANY MAN'S*** WORK SHALL BE BURNED, HE SHALL SUFFER LOSS, BUT HE HIMSELF SHALL BE SAVED; YET SO AS BY FIRE." 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

The above Corinthians passage on postmortem salvation emphatically says "every man" and "any man" ("hekastos" and "ei tis"). Where on earth do brimstoners get the idea 1 Corinthians 3 is only talking about believers who are already "saved" in this life, and thus would not NEED to be "saved" yet again in the next life (as the passage says).

Infernalists seem to be unable (or unwilling) to process the words "every" and "all" throughout the New Testament when it is applied toward Jesus being the savior of the world to such an extent that, at the end of all the ages, "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them [will be heard] saying, 'To him who sits on the throne and

to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!'" - Revelation 5:13.

Paul was quite articulate and easily capable of clarifying in no uncertain terms that the postmortem "judgement fire" described in 1 Corinthians 3 applied to "only believers," or to "only the brethren," or to "only the members of the church." He could simply have inserted the word "believers" in the passage after ""every"... but he didn't.

Christ IS the foundation of every human who comes into the world, whether they become a believer or remain an unbeliever.

Scriptures teach that ALL humans are made in the image of God and thus ALL humans are created to be temples of the Holy Spirit. Some of these temples are not yet filled with the Holy Spirit, some are, while others are in process of being filled, either in this age or this age or the age to come. But Christ is the true light who lights EVERY human who comes into the world, and that in Him we ALL move and live and have our being.

Below are passages for the point that Christ is the foundation of "each" and "every" human who comes into the world.

Jesus was "the true Light, which lights EVERY man that comes into the world." John 1:9. (not just believers as infernalists claim).

“ALL things were made through Him (Christ), and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” - John 1:3-4.

“In Him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’” - Acts 17:28 (Paul is referring here to even Pagans being God’s offspring and living in Him).

“One God and FATHER OF ALL, who is over all and THROUGH ALL and IN ALL.” Ephesians 4:6.

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” - Colossians 1:16-17.

Thus, the context of 1 Corinthians 3 is not limited to just believers but to "any man" and to "every man.”

Thankfully, I prefer to believe that “all" and "every" DOES mean "all" and "every" to Jesus. This is why He is rightly called "the savior of the world" (John 4:42), not the savior of just the exclusive few. Jesus came to form a holy world, not a holy club.

Chapter One Hundred Eleven

Was Moses' manna from heaven?

Jesus gave us the clear answer in the following passage. "Then Jesus said unto them , Verily , verily , I say unto you , Moses gave you NOT that bread from heaven ; but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven ." John 6:32.

“For the law was given by Moses , BUT grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." John 1:17.

These above Scriptures should give us pause. The reason? Because if Moses didn't give us "true bread from heaven," and if Moses' revelations didn't give us "grace and truth,"

then we really need to reevaluate going solely to Moses' writings for intimate and ultimate guidance.

Scriptures are clear that before Jesus came, nobody knew God's undivided nature of perfect goodness - - not Moses, Noah, Abraham, David or Job. They partially could see God's goodness from behind and at an angled distance, but they could not behold God's perfect 360° goodness. See Exodus 30:18-23.

When Moses asked to see God's "glory," God hid him in the cleft of the rock and told Moses he could only "see His goodness" from behind after He had passed by, and then only at a angled distance.

This passage is vital in the first instance because it uses the terms "God's glory" and "God's goodness" interchangeably, thus making the concepts synonymous. But, more more importantly, this passage allegorically illustrates a developmental limitation from which Moses and the other OT saints suffered.

Moses could not perceive God's goodness from the front because: 1) he was still living entirely in his own righteousness, 2) he was not indwelt by the Pentecostal Holy Spirit, 3) he was burdened with a sinful anger problem, and 4) he was totally clueless about Satan and the fallen powers, whom he NEVER even mentions in all his writings.

Jesus came to reveal all of these above 4 issues to US, through the New Covenant, by filling us with HIS righteousness, exposing Satan's kingdom of darkness to us, filling us with the Holy Spirit, and revealing God's personified essence as love.

Jesus revealed that the veiled “by the letter” Old Testament view of God was always pre-Christ, often sub-Christ and occasionally anti-Christ. This is why Jesus came to “fulfill” Scriptures - - to “fill” them “full” of His goodness and truth.

Jesus was clear that Moses’ law at its best was pre-Christ in that it always spoke and prophesied of Christ to come. Matt. 11:13; Lk. 24:27; Jn. 5:46.

However, Jesus was just as clear that Moses’ version of the law was often sub-Christ, such as when it spoke of God’s view of anger (Matt. 5:21-22), adultery (Matt. 5:27-28), divorce (Matt. 5:31-32) and swearing (Matt. 5:33-37). In all these instances, Jesus said that Moses’ law MAY SAY this, BUT I SAY this.

Jesus’ "this" went much deeper into the heart than Moses’ "this." Moses’ revelation addressed killing but not hating, adultery but not lust, divorce but not devotion, and swearing but not truth-speaking. In this sense, Moses’ view of God’s law was much more shallow and limited than Jesus’ vision, which is why we can label it sub-Christ.

Yet, on occasion Moses' vision of God's law went beyond being pre-Christ or sub-Christ. Moses' law actually becomes anti-Christ in a few selected passages. Whereas Jesus amplified and extended Moses' law when it was sub-Christ in not going deep enough into the heart of man, Jesus outright contradicted and countermanded Moses' law in certain passages where it promoted revenge, hatred and violence.

Such a passage occurs in Matt. 5:38-48, where Jesus completely contradicted Moses' law in the areas of retaliation, accommodation, cooperation, generosity and love in the treatment of enemies.

Whereas Moses taught an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, Jesus taught non-violence and accommodation of our enemies. Moses taught in Deuteronomy 7 the violent hatred of the enemies of God, whereas Jesus taught love and blessing toward all enemies. Moses' hatred, hardness and vengeance corrupted his vision of God and occasionally caused him to project a view of God which was anti-Christ to the kingdom of love and peace which Jesus heralded.

The problem with Moses then, is that he partially misrepresented the true character of God. Though he was divinely inspired, faithful in all his house, and the meekest man in the land; still Moses in his own righteousness could not abide in and fully convey the true nature of God.

Remember the fun-house mirrors we visited at carnivals as kids? They did reflect our image, but in a distorted way which misrepresented our true form. Similarly, Moses was a warped mirror with various distortions and imperfections, particularly in the area of anger and violence. Nu. 20:1-12; Ex. 2:11-14.

Though Moses was truly inspired by the real image of the real God, his own inner distortions caused a warped reflection of that true image. What God sent in love, Moses sometimes conveyed in wrath. What God sent to bless, Moses sometimes used to condemn. What God sent to transform men, Moses sometimes misused to deform man.

It was because of these distortions that Jesus normally referred to the Old Testament not as God's law or His Father's law. Instead, Jesus referred to it as Moses' law. ("Moses commanded" in Matt. 8:4; Mk. 1:44; Lk 5:14; Jn. 8:5; "Moses said" in Mk. 7:10; "Moses wrote" in Lk. 20:28; 24:44; "the law of Moses" in Jn. 1:17;7: 19, 23; Lk. 2:22; Mk. 12:26).

Jesus didn't normally attribute Moses' law as being said directly by God. Perhaps he meant that Moses and the other Old Testament saints heard God the best they could in their own righteousness, but their limitations resulted in them "stating" incomplete, shallow and even distorted versions of God's pure word.

The Apostle Paul called the Old Testament law "the ministration of death" because the letter of the law kills. 2 Cor. 3:6-7. Hebrews 8:7 confirms the Old Testament was not "without flaw."

The letter kills because it is infected with wrong thinking about God. It pollutes our true Godly inspiration with our own anger, impatience, violence and wrath. God gives a divine word, but we can then mutate it into an ungodly sentence. Or, God may give us a divine sentence, but we can then deform it into an unrighteous paragraph. Or, God may give us a divine paragraph, but we can corrupt it into a warped chapter.

This is why we must let God's Spirit "de-husk " the literal shells or kernels off of Scriptures when they contradict God's nature so that we may eat the pure Spiritual fruit and true essence of it.

Moses' problem was just this - - though he was inspired by God as no other man had ever been, he still occasionally corrupted, husked, warped and distorted that inspiration with his own anger, violence and impatience. That was Moses' problem. That is our problem.

Only Jesus walked distortion-free. He never added His own wrath to the Father's indwelling inspiration. Jesus only spoke what He heard from the Father and only did what He saw the Father do. Jn. 5:19,30.

This is why Jesus "was counted worthy of more glory than Moses" (Heb. 3:3), because Jesus never misrepresented or warped the true image of the Father. Although God frequently spoke to Moses and inspired him to such an extent that his skin shone with God's glory, Moses could not retain that inspiration so that the glory always faded. Moses wore a veil on his face so that the people would not see the glory fade away. 2 Cor. 3:13.

In other words, as Moses' own wrath, violence and impatience began to husk over the glorious inspiration of God, the people would not know that the glory had faded because of Moses' mask.

The result is that the people had no discernment as to when Moses was manifesting God's glorious thoughts versus when Moses was projecting his own fleshly opinions onto his image of God. The people didn't know where God's inspiration ended and Moses' opinions began.

Or, perhaps stated better, the people didn't perceive how thickly Moses husked and encased God's inspiration with his own flawed flesh.

The perfect example of this dynamic occurs in Numbers 20:6-12. Here, when the grumbling Israelites were dying of thirst and hunger, God commanded Moses to speak to the rock so that water could gush forth and His people would know that He loved and cared for them.

Moses, who had a continual problem with anger, allowed that anger to distort the image of God which he was portraying.

Instead of speaking to the rock as commanded, Moses struck the rock in anger with his staff while simultaneously cursing the people with his own wrath. The rock did in fact gush forth water, but due to Moses' misrepresentation of God's tone, the people thought that God was disgusted and angry with them.

Moses did an evil thing, but projected it onto God as a good thing. This sin in fact is what kept Moses out of the Promised Land, his "failure to sanctify the name and nature of the Lord." It's the same sin that keeps us out of the Promised Land - - misunderstanding and misrepresenting God's good nature.

Again and again we see Moses' limitations in accurately beholding and conveying the Lord's true nature. In Exodus 33:13-23, Moses sought to see God's "glory." God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock so that Moses could see His "goodness" from behind as it passed by.

This passage is important because it tells us: (1) God's glory is the same as God's goodness; (2) To see any aspect of God's goodness, we must be placed into the cleft of the Rock of Ages - - Jesus, i.e. only through the indwelling Christ can we perceive the true nature of God; and (3) Moses, as the finest example of Old Testament righteousness, could not see God's goodness

from a full frontal view. This explains Jesus' explanation of what John Calvin called the Old Testament saints' "slight capacity" to understand the Spiritual truths of the New Testament.

Moses could not fit his mind and heart around the fulness of God's goodness. He filled in the gaps and blind spots with his own wrathful opinions and impatient spirit. Moses is certainly not the only one guilty of this. All Christians struggle with this same mistake. The difference is that New Testament believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit to help avoid repeating this mistake.

A New Testament example of this same wrong dynamic occurs in James' and John's conversation with Jesus after the Samaritans refused to receive them into their village. Lk. 9:51-56. James and John asked Jesus if they should call down fire on the Samaritans as the prophet Elijah did.

Jesus' answer was truly stunning. He told them that they knew not "what manner of spirit" they were "of," for He had come to "save" men, not to "destroy" them. James and John were willing to call their own evil wrath and murderous intent "good" and thereby misrepresent the character of Jesus. In other words, they struck the rock just as Moses did, and consequently maligned the character of God whose name they were invoking.

Until we are fully persuaded of God's goodness, we too are unable to know what spirit we are "of."

This uncertainty causes schizophrenic beliefs about God which enable and empower our wrath, violence and revenge.

Considering modern day examples, I was watching a documentary the other day on the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers. It included the interview of a father who had lost his son when the second tower fell. His son had been a fireman and his death had devastated him. The father initially said "God took his son away" and that he had come to accept his death as God's loving will for which he now "thanked" God.

Just a few seconds later, he railed that the terrorists had to pay for the evil that they had done by being wiped out, killed and destroyed. I was stunned in sympathy for this man, but was astounded at the double-mindedness of his position. He accepted the taking of his son's life as God's will, but then wanted violent revenge against the terrorists who did the actual killing.

The examples go on and on. People on the one hand give God the credit for their paralysis, sickness, misfortune, and devastated state.

Yet, within their hearts, they harbor venomous resentment towards the direct causes of their condition. I will grant that even some have become so convinced that God brought the misfortune, that they have in fact stopped resenting anything and have fully accepted God's mysterious will.

Though certainly well intended, integrity compels us to ask if this is the right view of God.

We must ultimately seek to hear Jesus, NOT Moses. "And , behold , there appeared unto them Moses and Elijah talking with him . Then answered Peter , and said unto Jesus , 'Lord , it is good for us to be here : if you will, let us make here three tabernacles ; one for you , and one for Moses , and one for Elijah.' While he yet spoke , behold , a bright cloud overshadowed them : and behold a voice out of the cloud , who said , 'This is my beloved Son , in whom I am well pleased ; HEAR HIM.'" Matthew 17:3-5.

In other words, don't listen TO Moses or Elijah in isolation--- rather, listen THROUGH them and hear the upgraded voice of Jesus!

Chapter One Hundred Twelve

How early did the Church preach the divinity of Jesus?

You know, everybody is free to believe what they choose about the deity of Christ. "Think and let think," as Wesley said.

But what they AREN'T entitled to do (at least without significant blowback) is to make sweeping claims about the church fathers which are demonstrably false.

And one such claim making the rounds right now is that NO Christians ever claimed that Jesus was God for the first 400 years AD.

I can't think of anything LESS true than this jaw-dropping claim.

Jesus as God was profusely preached and proclaimed by the early Church.

Here are a few (and by few I mean many) examples.

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians AD 107

"Introduction: …being united and elected through the true passion by the will of the Father, and Jesus Christ, our God (Ho Theos): Abundant happiness through Jesus Christ, and His undefiled grace.

Chapter 7: There is one Physician who is possessed both of flesh and Spirit; both made and not made; God existing in flesh; true life in death; both of Mary and God; first passible and then impassible — even Jesus Christ our Lord."

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to Polycarp, AD 107

"Chapter 3: Be on the alert for him who is above time, the Timeless, the Unseen, the One who became visible for our sakes, who was beyond touch and passion, yet who for our sakes became subject to suffering, and endured everything for us."

Mathetes, Epistle to Diognetus AD 130

"Chapter 7: Truly God Himself, who is almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven,

and placed among men, [Him who is] the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word, and has firmly established Him in their hearts. He did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, or angel, or ruler, or any one of those who bear sway over earthly things, or one of those to whom the government of things in the heavens has been entrusted, but the very Creator and Fashioner of all things — by whom He made the heavens — by whom he enclosed the sea within its proper bounds — whose ordinances all the stars faithfully observe — from whom the sun has received the measure of his daily course to be observed."

Epistle of Barnabus, AD 100

"Chapter 5: There is yet this also, my brethren; if the Lord endured to suffer

for our souls, though He was Lord of the whole world, unto whom God

said from the foundation of the world, Let us make man after our

image and likeness, how then did He endure to suffer at the hand

of men?"

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, AD 160

"Chapter 48

Trypho: For when you say that this Christ existed as God before the ages, then that He submitted to be born and become man, yet that He is not man of man, this [assertion] appears to me to be not merely paradoxical, but also foolish.

Justin: I know that the statement does appear to be paradoxical, especially to those of your race, who are ever unwilling to understand or to perform the [requirements] of God, but [ready to perform] those of your teachers, as God Himself declares. Now assuredly, Trypho, [the proof] that this man is the Christ of God does not fail, though I be unable to prove that He existed formerly as Son of the Maker of all things, being God, and was born a man by the Virgin."

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, AD 180

"Chapter 3: As it has been clearly demonstrated that the Word, who existed in the beginning with God, by whom all things were made, who was also always present with mankind, was in these last days, according to the time appointed by the Father, united to His own workmanship, inasmuch as He became a man liable to suffering, [it follows] that every objection is set aside of those who say, "If our Lord was born at that time, Christ had therefore no previous existence." For I have shown that the Son of God did not then begin to exist, being with the Father from the beginning; but when He became incarnate, and was made man, He commenced

afresh the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam — namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God — that we might recover in Christ Jesus."

Caius, Against Artemon AD 210

"For they say that all those of the first age, and the apostles themselves, both received and taught those things which these men now maintain; and that the truth of Gospel preaching was preserved until the times of Victor, who was the thirteenth bishop in Rome from Peter, and that from his successor Zephyrinus the truth was falsified. And perhaps what they allege might be credible, did not the Holy Scriptures, in the first place, contradict them. And then, besides, there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of Victor, which they wrote against the heathen in defense of the truth, and against the heresies of their time: I mean Justin and Miltiades, and Tatian and Clement, and many others, in all which divinity is ascribed to Christ. For who is ignorant of the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the rest, which declare Christ to be God and man? All the psalms, too, and hymns of brethren, which have been written from the beginning by the faithful, celebrate Christ the Word of God, ascribing divinity to Him."

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Ephesians AD 107

Chapter 19: Hence every kind of magic was destroyed, and every bond of wickedness disappeared; ignorance was removed, and the old kingdom abolished, God Himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life."

Ignatius of Antioch, Epistle to the Romans, Ad 107

"Introduction: Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which has obtained mercy, through the majesty of the Most High Father, and Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son; the Church which is beloved and enlightened by the will of Him that wills all things which are according to the love of Jesus Christ our God… I wish an abundance of happiness unblameably, in Jesus Christ our God."

Justin Martyr, Second Apology to the Roman Senate, AD 161

"Chapter 6: And His Son, who alone is properly called Son, the Word, who also was with Him and was begotten before the works, when at first He created and arranged all things by Him, is called Christ, in reference to His being anointed and God's ordering all things through Him; this name itself also containing an unknown significance; as also the appellation "God" is not a name, but an opinion implanted in the nature of men of a thing that can hardly be explained. But "Jesus," His name as man and Saviour, has also significance. For He was made man also, as we before said, having been conceived

according to the will of God the Father, for the sake of believing men, and for the destruction of the demons."

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, AD 160

"Chapter 36: (Justin) As you wish, Trypho, I shall come to these proofs which you seek in the fitting place; but now you will permit me first to recount the prophecies, which I wish to do in order to prove that Christ is called both God and Lord of hosts.

Trypho: (In response) For you utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud; then that he became man, was crucified, and ascended up to heaven, and comes again to earth, and ought to be worshipped.

Chapter 63: Therefore, these words testify explicitly that He is witnessed to by Him who established these things, as deserving to be worshipped, as God and as Christ.

Novatian, Treatise on the Trinity, AD 260

Chapter 13: After quoting from John 1:1, 1:3, 1:14, 3:13, 10:30, 17:5, 20:28, Rev 19:13, Ps 45:1, 19:6-7, Col 1:16, Rom 9:5, Gal 1:1 and 12, He concludes:

Therefore, He is not man only, but God also, since all things are by Him; so that we reasonably ought to understand that Christ is not man only, who is subsequent to all things, but God also, since by Him all things were

made. For how can you say that He is man only, when you see Him also in the flesh, unless because when both aspects are considered, both truths are rightly believed?

Chapter 25: Therefore, say they, if Christ is not man only, but God also — and Scripture tells us that He died for us, and was raised again — then Scripture teaches us to believe that God died; or if God does not die, and Christ is said to have died, then Christ will not be God, because God cannot be admitted to have died. If they ever could understand or had understood what they read, they would never speak after such a perilous fashion. But the folly of error is always hasty in its descent, and it is no new thing if those who have forsaken the lawful faith descend even to perilous results. For if Scripture were to set forth that Christ is God only, and that there was no association of human weakness mingled in His nature, this intricate argument of theirs might reasonably avail something. If Christ is God, and Christ died, then God died. But when Scripture determines, as we have frequently shown, that He is not only God, but man also, it follows that what is immortal may be held to have remained uncorrupted. For who cannot understand that the divinity is impassible, although the human weakness is liable to suffering? When, therefore, Christ is understood to be mingled and associated as well of that which God is, as of that which man is — for the Word was made flesh, and dwelt in us— who cannot easily apprehend of himself, without any teacher and interpreter, that it was not that in Christ

that died which is God, but that in Him died which is man? For what if the divinity in Christ does not die, but the substance of the flesh only is destroyed, when in other men also, who are not flesh only, but flesh and soul, the flesh indeed alone suffers the inroads of wasting and death, while the soul is seen to be uncorrupted, and beyond the laws of destruction and death?"

Tertullian, Against Praexas AD 200

"Chapter 25: What follows Philip's question, and the Lord's whole treatment of it, to the end of John's Gospel, continues to furnish us with statements of the same kind, distinguishing the Father and the Son, with the properties of each. Then there is the Paraclete or Comforter, also, which He promises to pray for to the Father, and to send from heaven after He had ascended to the Father. He is called another Comforter, indeed; John 14:16 but in what way He is another we have already shown, He shall receive of mine, says Christ, John 16:14 just as Christ Himself received of the Father's. Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. These Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, I and my Father are One, John 10:30 in respect of unity of substance not singularity of number."

Melito of Sardis, Paschal Homily AD 165

"And who has been murdered? Who is the murderer? I am reluctant to tell, but I am constrained to say. For if the murder had taken place by night, or if the slaughter had occurred in a desert place, it would be easy to keep silent. But now, in the midst of the street and the town, in the midst of the city, in full view of all, the Just One has been unjustly murdered.

And so he has been hoisted on a cross and a title added, indicating he was slaughtered. Who was he? To say it is hard, but not to say it more dreadful still. Only hear it trembling on whose account the earth trembled. He who suspended the earth is himself suspended; he who fixed the heavens is himself transfixed; he who made all things fast is made fast upon the tree. The Master has been outraged. God has been slaughtered. The King of Israel has been slain by Israel's right hand."

"Divinity of the Son: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." John 1:1.

"I and My Father are one." John 10:30.

"He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? John 14:9.

"And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'" John 20:28.

"But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You." Heb. 1:8, 9.

"He is Lord of all the world, to whom God said at the foundation of the world, 'Let us make man after our image, and after our likeness." Barnabas (c. 70–130, E), 1.139.

"Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood was given for us." Clement of Rome (c. 96, W), 1.11."

"God Himself was manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life." Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.58.

"Continue in intimate union with Jesus Christ, our God." Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.68.

"I pray for your happiness forever in our God, Jesus Christ." Ignatius (c. 105, E), 1.96.

"The Christians trace the beginning of their religion to Jesus the Messiah. He is called the Son of the Most High God. It is said that God came down from heaven. He assumed flesh and clothed Himself with it from a Hebrew virgin. And the Son of God lived in a daughter of man." Aristides (c. 125, E), 9.265.

"Truly God Himself, who is Almighty, the Creator of all things, and invisible, has sent from heaven, and placed

among men, the One who is the truth, and the holy and incomprehensible Word. . . . God did not, as one might have imagined, send to men any servant, angel, or ruler. . . . Rather, He sent the very Creator and Fashioner of all things—by whom He made the heavens. . . . As a king sends his Son, who is also a king, so God sent Him. He sent Him as God." Letter to Diognetus (c. 125–200), 1.27.

"Brethren, it is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God—as the Judge of the living and the dead." Second Clement (c. 150), 7.517.

"We reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.166.

"The Word, . . . He is Divine." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.166.

"The Father of the universe has a Son. And He, being the First-Begotten Word of God, is even God." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.184.

"Next to God, we worship and love the Word who is from the unbeggoten and ineffable God." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.193.

"For Christ is King, Priest, God, Lord, Angel, and Man." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.211.

"[TRYPHO, A JEW:] You utter many blasphemies, in that you seek to persuade us that this crucified man was with Moses and Aaron, and spoke to them in the pillar of the cloud." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.213.

"Moses . . . declares that He who appeared to Abraham under the oak in Mamre is God. He was sent with the two angels in His company to judge Sodom by another One, who remains ever in the supercelestial places, invisible to all men, holding personal contact with no one. We believe this other One to be the Maker and Father of all things. . . . Yet, there is said to be another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things. And He is also called an Angel, because he announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.223.

"He deserves to be worshipped as God and as Christ." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.229.

"David predicted that He would be born from the womb before the sun and moon, according to the Father's will. He made Him known, being Christ, as God, strong and to be worshipped." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.237.

"The Son ministered to the will of the Father. Yet, nevertheless, He is God, in that He is the First-Begotten of all creatures." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.262.

"If you had understood what has been written by the prophets, you would not have denied that He was God, Son of the Only, Unbegotten, Unutterable God." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.263.

"Rejoice, O you heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship Him" [Deut. 32:43]. Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.264.

"He is forever the first in power. For Christ, being the First-Born of every creature, became again the chief of another race regenerated by Himself through water, faith, and wood." Justin Martyr (c. 160, E), 1.268.

"Then did the whole creation see clearly that for man's sake the Judge was condemned, and the Invisible was seen, and the Illimitable was circumscribed, and the Impassible suffered, and the Immortal died, and the Celestial was laid in the grave." Melito (c. 170, E), 8.756.

"God was put to death, the King of Israel slain!" Melito (c. 170, E), 8.758.

"There is the one God and the Logos proceeding from Him, the Son. We understand that the Son is inseparable from Him." Athenagoras (c. 175, E), 2.137.

"God by His own Word and Wisdom made all things." Theophilus (c. 180, E), 2.91.

"'Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the scepter of Your kingdom is a right scepter. You have loved

righteousness and hated iniquity. Therefore, God, Your God, has anointed You.' For the Spirit designates by the name of God—both Him who is anointed as Son, and He who anoints, that is, the Father. And again, 'God stood in the congregation of the gods; He judges among the gods.' Here he refers to the Father and the Son, and those who have received the adoption." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.419.

"For He fulfills the bountiful and comprehensive will of His Father, inasmuch as He is Himself the Savior of those who are saved, and the Lord of those who are under authority, and the God of all those things that have been formed, the Only-Begotten of the Father." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.443.

"I have shown from the Scriptures that none of the sons of Adam are, absolutely and as to everything, called God, or named Lord. But Jesus is Himself in His own right, beyond all men who ever lived, God, Lord, King Eternal, and the Incarnate Word. . . . He is the Holy Lord, the Wonderful, the Counselor, the Beautiful in appearance, and the Mighty God." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.449.

"Thus He indicates in clear terms that He is God, and that His advent was in Bethlehem. . . . God, then, was made man, and the Lord did Himself save us."Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.451.

"He is God, for the name Emmanuel indicates this." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.452.

"Christ Himself, therefore, together with the Father, is the God of the living, who spoke to Moses, and who was also manifested to the fathers." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.467.

"Now the father of the human race is the Word of God." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.505.

"How can they be saved unless it was God who worked out their salvation upon earth? Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has first passed into man."Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.507.

"It is plain that He was Himself the Word of God, who was made the Son of man. He received from the Father the power of remission of sins. He was man, and He was God. This was so that since as man He suffered for us, so as God He might have compassion on us." Irenaeus (c. 180, E/W), 1.545.

"He is God in the form of man, stainless, the minister of His Father's will, the Word who is God, who is in the Father, who is at the Father's right hand. And with the form of God, He is God." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.210.

"There is a suggestion of the divinity of the Lord in [Isaac's] not being slain. Jesus rose again after His burial, having suffered no harm—just like Isaac was released from being sacrificed." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.

"O the great God! O the perfect child! The Son in the Father and the Father in the Son. . . . God the Word, who became man for our sakes." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.215.

"The Father of all is alone perfect, for the Son is in Him and the Father is in the Son." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.222.

"Our Instructor is the holy God Jesus, the Word." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.223.

"Nothing, then, is hated by God, nor yet by the Word. For both are one—that is, God. For He has said, 'In the beginning the Word was in God, and the Word was God.'" Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.225.

"He who has the Almighty God, the Word, is in want of nothing." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.281.

"Pointing to the First-Begotten Son, Peter writes, accurately comprehending the statement, 'In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth." And He is called Wisdom by all the prophets. This is He who is the Teacher of all created beings. Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.493.

"The best thing on earth is the most pious man. The best thing in heaven, the nearer in place and purer, is an angel, the partaker of the eternal and blessed life. But the nature of the Son, which is nearest to Him who

is alone the Almighty One, is the most perfect, most holy, most potent, most princely, most kingly, and most beneficent. This is the highest excellence, who orders all things in accordance with the Father's will and holds the helm of the universe in the best way. . . . The Son of God is never displaced . . . being always everywhere and being contained nowhere. He is complete mind, complete paternal light. He is all eyes, seeing all things, hearing all things, knowing all things. . . . All the host of angels and gods are placed in subjection to Him. He, the paternal Word, exhibits the holy administration for Him who put [all things] in subjection to Him." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.524.

"The Son is the cause of all good things, by the will of the Almighty Father." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.525.

"He is the true Only-Begotten, the express image of the glory of the universal King and Almighty Father, who impresses on the man of God the seal of the perfect contemplation, according to His own image. So that there is now a third divine image, made as far as possible like the Second Cause, the Essential Life." Clement of Alexandria (c. 195, E), 2.527.

"Nor do we differ from the Jews concerning God. We must make, therefore, a remark or two as to Christ's divinity." Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.34.

"Search, then, and see if the divinity of Christ is true. Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.36. To all He is equal, to all King, to all Judge, to all God and Lord."Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.158.

"Christ's name is extending everywhere, believed everywhere, worshipped by all the above-enumerated nations, reigning everywhere. Tertullian (c. 197, W), 3.158. This opens the ears of Christ our God." Tertullian (c. 200, W), 3.715.

"We who believe that God really lived on earth, and took upon Him the low estate of human form, for the purpose of man's salvation, are very far from thinking as those do who refuse to believe that God cares for anything. . . . Fortunately, however, it is a part of the creed of Christians even to believe that God did die, and yet that He is alive forevermore." Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.309.

"Christ is received in the person of Christ, because even in this manner is He our God." Tertullian (c. 207, W), 3.319.

"He is not on this account to be regarded as an angel—as a Gabriel or a Michael. . . . Since He is the Spirit of God and the Power of the Highest, can He be regarded as lower than the angels? He who is truly God and the Son of God? Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.534. For so did the Father previously say to the Son: 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness.'"Tertullian (c. 210, W), 3.549.

"Having been made man, He is still God forever. For to this effect, John also has said, "Who is, and who was, and who is to come—the Almighty." And he has appropriately called Christ "the Almighty." For in this, he has said only what Christ testifies of Himself. For Christ gave this testimony and said, "All things are delivered unto me by my Father." Hippolytus (c. 205, W), 5.225.

"Besides, there are writings of certain brethren older than the times of Victor, which they wrote against the pagans in defense of the truth and against the heresies of their day. . . . For who is ignorant of the books of Irenaeus and Melito, and the rest, which declare Christ to be God and man? All the psalms, too, and hymns of brethren—which have been written from the beginning by the faithful—celebrate Christ the Word of God, ascribing divinity to Him. Eusebius, quoting Caius (c. 215, W), 5.601. No one should be offended that the Savior is also God, seeing God is the Father. Likewise, since the Father is called Omnipotent, no one should be offended that the Son of God is also called Omnipotent. For in this way, the words understand Him as existing in those narrow limits in which He was once confined for our sakes. He is not in that circumscribed body that He occupied on earth, when dwelling among men—according to which He might be considered as enclosed in one particular place." Origen (c. 225, E), 4.299.

"Every beginning of those families that have a relation to God as to the Father of all, took its beginning lower down with Christ, who is next to the God and Father of all, being thus the Father of every soul, as Adam is the father of all men." Origen (c. 225, E), 4.370, 371.

"No one will logically think this Son of God, in respect of the Word being God, is to be contained in any place. . . . For it is absurd to say that Christ was in Peter and in Paul, but not in Michael the archangel, nor in Gabriel. And from this, it is distinctly shown that the divinity of the Son of God was not shut up in some place." Origen (c. 225, E), 4.377.

"We might say of Christ, that by nature His first principle [Gr. arche] is deity. However, in relation to us, who cannot comprehend the whole truth about Him because of its very greatness, His first principle is His manhood." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.307.

"If it is permitted to say this, I consider that the beginning of real existence was the Son of God, who says, "I am the beginning and the end, the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." . . . Now, God is altogether one and simple. But, for many reasons, our Savior is made many things—since God set Him forth as a propitiation and a first fruits of the whole creation. . . . The whole creation, so far as it is capable of redemption, stands in need of Him." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.308.

"Should anyone inquire whether all that the Father knows . . . is known to our Savior also, and should he—imagining that he will thereby glorify the Father—show that some things known to the Father are unknown to the Son. . . we must remind him that it is from His being the truth that He is Savior. Accordingly, if He is the complete truth, then there is nothing true that He does not know. Truth must not limp for the want of the things that—according to these persons—are known to the Father only."Origen (c. 228, E), 9.313.

"One cannot be in the Father or with the Father except by ascending upwards from below and first coming to the divinity of the Son—through which one may be led by the hand and brought to the blessedness of the Father himself." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.313.

"The arrangement of the sentences seem to indicate an order. First we have, "In the beginning was the Word." Next, "And the Word was with God." And thirdly, "And the Word was God." It was arranged this way so that it might be seen that it is the Word's being with God that makes Him God." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.323.

"He is said to have a name written that no one knows but He Himself. For there are some things that are known to the Word alone. For the beings that come into existence after Him have a poorer nature than His." Origen (c. 228, E), 9.327.

"The Canaanite woman came and worshipped Jesus as God, saying, "Lord help me." Origen (c. 245, E), 9.446.

"He is perceived as being the Word, for He was God in the beginning with God. He reveals the Father." Origen (c. 245, E), 9.452.

"We now believe Jesus Himself, when He speaks respecting his divinity: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.426.

"The Gospels do not consider Him who in Jesus said these words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," to have been of so circumscribed a nature so as to have had an existence nowhere out of the soul and body of Jesus. . . . Jesus himself, in raising the minds of His disciples to higher thoughts of the Son of God, says: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of you." . . . We quote these passages, making no distinction between the Son of God and Jesus." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.434.

"The divinity of Jesus is established by these things: the existence of the churches of the saved, the prophecies uttered concerning Him, the cures brought about in His name, and the Wisdom and knowledge that are in Him. Origen (c. 248, E), 4.477. The Word that was in the beginning with God (who is also very God) may come to us." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.499.

"Every prayer, supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving is to be sent up to the Supreme God through the High Priest—the living Word and God, who is above all the angels. And to the Word himself will we also pray, make intercessions, and offer thanksgiving." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.544.

"Although we may call him a second God, let men know that by the term, "second God," we mean nothing else than a Virtue capable of including all other virtues, and a Reason capable of containing all reason." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.561.

"These are not the words of Christians. Rather, they are of those who are altogether alienated from salvation and who neither acknowledge Jesus as Savior, nor God, nor Teacher, nor Son of God." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.587.

"The architect of this world is the Son of God. His Father is the first God and Sovereign Ruler over all things." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.595.

"The people who sat in darkness (the Gentiles) saw a great light"—the God Jesus." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.603.

"If the same question is put to us in regard to the worship of Jesus, we will show that the right to be honored was given to Him by God, so that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father." For the prophecies that preceded His birth were preparations for His worship." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.642.

[CELSUS SAYS:] "If these people worshipped one God alone and no other, they would perhaps have some valid argument against the worship of others. But they pay excessive reverence to one who has but lately appeared among men. And they think it is no offense against God if they worship His servant also." To this, we reply that if Celsus had known that saying, "I and My Father are one," and the words used in prayer by the Son of God, "As you and I are one," he would not have thought that we worship any others besides Him who is the Supreme God. For he says, "My Father is in Me and I in Him." . . . However, from these words, someone may be afraid of my joining those who deny that the Father and the Son are two persons. If so, let him weigh the following passage: "And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and of one soul," so he may understand the meaning of the saying, "I and My Father are one." We therefore worship one God—the Father and the Son—as I have explained. So our argument against the worship of other gods still continues valid. And we do not "reverence beyond measure one who has but lately appeared," as though He did not exist before. For we believe Him when He says, "Before Abraham was, I am.". . . We worship, therefore, the Father of truth and the Son, who is the truth. And although they are two Persons or Beings, they are one in unity of thought, harmony, and identity of will. So entirely are they one that he who has seen the Son. . . has seen in Him (who is the image of God) God Himself. . . . Accordingly, we worship with all our

power the one God and His only Son—the Word and the image of God—by prayers and supplications. And we offer our petitions to the God of the universe through His Only-Begotten Son. To the Son, we first present them, and beseech Him, as "the propitiation for our sins," and our High Priest, to offer our desires, sacrifices, and prayers to the Most High. Our faith, therefore, is directed to God through His Son." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.643, 644.

"To explain this fully, and to justify the conduct of the Christians in refusing homage to any object except the Most High God and the First-Born of all creation (who is His Word and is God), we must quote this from Scripture." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.639.

"We sing hymns to the Most High alone and to his Only-Begotten, who is the Word and God." Origen (c. 248, E), 4.665.

"Why, then, should man hesitate to call Christ "God," when he observes that He is declared to be God by the Father, according to the Scriptures? . . . Reasonably, then, whoever acknowledges Him to be God may find salvation in Christ as God. Whoever does not acknowledge Him to be God will lose salvation that he could not find elsewhere than in Christ as God." Novatian (c. 235, W), 5.621.

"In what way do they [the heretics] receive Christ as God? For now they cannot deny Him to be God. Do they receive Him as God the Father or God the Son? If as the

Son, why do they deny that the Son of God is God? If as the Father, why do they not follow those who appear to maintain blasphemies of that kind?" Novatian (c. 235, W), 5.621.

"This saying can be true of no man: 'I and the Father are one." Christ alone declared this utterance out of the consciousness of His divinity. Finally, the apostle Thomas, instructed in all the proofs and conditions of Christ's divinity, says in reply to Christ, "My Lord and my God." Besides, the Apostle Paul says, "... of whom Christ came according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever." Novatian (c. 235, W), 5.622.

Chapter One Hundred Thirteen

Did the New Testament authors expressly allegorize any of the numerous violent passages of the Old Testament into non-violent readings?

I received an excellent question the other day that some of you might be interested in hearing, as well as my response.

It showed that the person had really thought things through.

Here is my paraphrase of the insightful question: "Yes, I agree that the New Testament does frequently and repeatedly allegorize Old Testament passages by reinterpreting them Christologically (i.e., in a way that figuratively or symbolically point to SOME aspect of Christ and His soon coming kingdom of light and love). HOWEVER, in all your examples, I never see the New Testament authors expressly allegorizing any of the numerous violent passages of the Old Testament into non-violent readings.

So, HERE is my specific question: HOW can we say that Old Testament divine violence should be allegorized IF the New Testament authors never demonstrated such a non-violent reading for us in any of their writings?"

Here is my response below:

"I actually think the New Testament writers DID demonstrate the allegorization of Old Testament types of LITERAL violence. Divine physical violence was allegorically corrected several places in the New Testament.

Here are a few of those passages. Whatever warfare imagery was used in the Old Testament and retained in the corporate psyche of New Testament saints, NOW

have to be reinterpreted, redefined, and reapplied to SPIRITUAL battlefields and NOT physical battlefields.

'For though we walk in the flesh, we are NOT waging war according to the FLESH. For the WEAPONS of our warfare are NOT of the FLESH but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.' - 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

'Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the BELT OF TRUTH, and having put on the BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up SHIELD OF FAITH , with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the HELMET OF SALVATION, and the SWORD OF THE SPIRIT, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and

supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.' - Ephesians 6:10-20.

'We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; WITH THE WEAPONS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE RIGHT HAND AND FOR THE LEFT; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.' -2 Corinthians 6:3-10.

In the passage below, Jezebel and her children are allegorical personifications from the Old Testament that point to toxic mindsets and the children/ideas they give birth to. It's these thought patterns and strongholds which must be slain, and NOT flesh and blood children made in the image of GOD.

'But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.' -Revelation 2:20-23.

Peter treats the flood of Noah, one of the most violent episodes of the Old Testament, on its allegorical level rather than on its literal level. 1 Peter 3:20-21, in fact, calls it a 'soul-saving' event, which is a 'figure' of 'baptism' for us.

So, on an allegorical level, the deliverance of Noah's family from a corrupted world, by means of 'water,' allegorizes our salvation, through baptism, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (1 Peter 3:20-21; Colossians 1:13).

God may flood away and destroy INTERNAL notions, but He would never flood away and destroy EXTERNAL nations. Not nations that have countless infants, toddlers, and children all made in God's image. It's not in God's nature to kill people who don't know what they are doing.' Jesus prayed for their forgiveness,

not for their destruction. God may seek to slay unloving notions, but never unloving nations.

The Bible authors pervasively used a literary technique called 'personification.' The ancient writers personified most everything. Personification is the representation of an object, concept, trait, or quality AS IF it were a person. Wicked nations become wicked notions.

External giants become internal strongholds of fear.

Wisdom and foolishness, in the Book of Proverbs, are both personalized as a woman lifting up their voice in the street.

Consider Paul's personification of sin ruling as a king in his body, and the 'old man' and 'new man' as personifications of two warring persons in the new creature after baptism.

So, keeping this personification technique in mind, the flood is spiritually understood as an external symbol, or 'figure' as Peter called it, of an internal event.

God, by His Holy Spirit, floods our inner being with cleansing and purging energies, a flood of baptismal fire which burns and washes away evil notions, evil impulses, evil strongholds, evil images, evil desires, etc.

Conversely, what gets saved is our core soul, that part of us which desires God. Jesus is the protective ark of our salvation, which carries us through this sanctifying flood

and lands us on dry land to begin our spiritual lives anew in a re-created inner world.

Chapter One Hundred Fourteen

How did the early Church fathers deal with the genocidal commands in the Old Testament?

How did the early Church fathers deal with the genocidal commands in the Old Testament, where it appears that God ordered the mass slaughter of children, women, and men at the hands of the Israelites? This seems horribly irreconcilable with the divine nature revealed by Jesus in the New Testament. Did the early fathers believe that the "dead letter" surface meaning of Scripture was always inerrant?

The Church Father Origen and the Alexandrian Church defined INERRANCY far differently than do modern exegetes. Origen used the term "inerrancy of Scripture" NOT to refer to the INERRANCY of the "ordinary or literal" sense of the text, which, according to Origen, contains numerous "literal" errors, impossible "literal" statements, and even fictional "literal" elements on occasion.

BUT, Origen DID believe that all Scripture was "inerrant in its SPIRITUAL or ALLEGORICAL" sense. He believed there was a spiritual and symbolic Christological meaning embedded in every text, which always went far beyond the "bare letter" of the text.

Sometimes, the Biblical human writer was largely aware of the subtextual/allegorical/symbolic meaning and thus knew he was writing figuratively.

Sometimes, the writer was only dimly aware. Still other times, the writer was totally unaware of the true and deeper meaning of what they were writing. The writers commonly wrote "far more than they knew."

C.S. Lewis believed the same thing, by the way. "The human qualities of the raw material show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, and even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not 'the Word of God' in the sense that every passage in itself gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God."

So how did Origen treat Old Testament violence, which appears sanctioned and/or commanded by God, at least on a literal level? Commenting on the brutal wars in which Joshua was involved, Origen says:

"The Jews who read these events, I am speaking of the Jews according to the appearance, who is circumcised in his body, and ignores the true Jew who is circumcised in his heart; this [physical] Jew does not find ought except description of wars, killing of enemies, and victory of the Israelites who plundered the possession of the foreigners and pagans, under the guidance of Joshua....

While the Jew, according to the heart, that is the Christian who follows Jesus, the Son of God, and NOT Joshua the Son of Nun, understands these events as representing the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. He says, 'Today also my master Jesus Christ fights the powers of evil and drives them out from the towns which they occupied before. He drives them out of our souls. He kills the kings who reigned over them, so that sin will not reign over us. As our souls become free from the reign of sin, they become a temple of the Lord and of God's Kingdom, hearing the words, 'The kingdom of God is within you'".... Homilies on Joshua 13.1, 125

"Unless those carnal wars (of the Old Testament) were a symbol of spiritual wars, I do not think that the Jewish historical books would ever have been passed down by the apostles to be read by Christ's followers in their

churches... Thus, the apostle, being aware that physical wars have become personal battles of the soul against spiritual adversaries, gives orders to the soldiers of Christ like a military commander when he says, 'Put on the armor of God so as to be able to hold your ground against the wiles of the devil'" (Eph. 6:11). (Hom 15.1, 138).

"(A Christian) affirms that even now my Lord Jesus Christ wars against opposing powers and casts out of their cities, that is, out of our souls, those who used to occupy them. And he destroys the kings who were ruling in our souls 'that sin may no longer reign in us,' (citing Rom. 6:12) so that, after he abolishes the king of sin from the city of our soul, our soul may become the city of God and God may reign in it, and it may be proclaimed to us, 'Behold, the kingdom of God is within you'" (citing Luke 17:21) (Hom 13.1, 125).

"This warfare must be conducted by the Christian not with physical weapons, but with prayers, meditation on the Word of God, good deeds and good thoughts. Only in this way is the Christian able to withstand the works of the Devil, all the while invoking the help of Jesus Christ" (Hom 16.5).

Origen repeatedly stresses that a Christian reads with a circumcised heart and thus 'understands that all these things are mysteries of the kingdom of heaven' (Hom 13.1, 125).

Origen says that literal (dead letter) Bible readings, at least in these warfare texts, are equivalent to heresy. Origen charges that reading Joshua's warfare texts literally is "teaching cruelty" (Hom 11.6, 119). Literalists "make malicious charges against our Lord and Savior, who commands the kingdom of heaven, which he had promised to those who believe in him, to be seized through violence" (Hom. 12.2 [121]). Without the "deeper understanding" of an allegorical reading, literalists, in Origen's view, produce "perverse doctrines beautified by the assertions of a splendid discourse... (that)... introduce into the churches sects not fitting to us, and to pollute all the church of the Lord" (Hom 7.7, 83).

So, Origen sees "the promised land enemies" not as hostile humans but as carnal and/or Satanic IMPULSES. These enemies represent NOT flesh and blood foes, but rather terroristic thoughts, malicious mentalities, lustful strongholds, deadly ideas, and sinful mindsets. This alone is where ANY level of violence is spiritually permitted--on our own inner toxic impulses and lethal ideas, NEVER on humans made in the image of God.

This sole and very narrow redefinition of spiritual violence is certainly approved by Paul in the following passages:

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, 'a repentance' which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold, this selfsame

thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what awe, yea what longing, yea what zeal, yea what avenging! In everything ye approved yourselves to be pure in the matter." 2 Corinthians 7:10-11.

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh (for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds), casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full." 2 Corinthians 10:3-6.

So, spiritual violence under Origen's and Paul's reading becomes a very different dynamic altogether. We are called to a muscular meekness which externally presents as an external lamb, but inwardly roars as a righteous lion. What evil then IS our MUSCULAR MEEKNESS called to maul and mangle? Simply put, it demolishes the things in our own minds and hearts that keep us from knowing and experiencing God directly. These include self-willed choices, mental strongholds, and vain imaginations.

But, violence against other humans made in the divine image of God is forever prohibited by thought or deed.

Instead, we are to flood our enemies with forgiveness. We throttle them with tenderness. We overcome them with an opposite spirit. We resist them with non-retaliation. We maul them with meekness. We capture them with the love of God. We ambush them with the awe of the Lord. We bombard them with bounteous blessings.

I think Origen was on to something wonderful here. And he wasn't the only church father who believed in this form of interpretation.

The majority of the early church fathers were so rich in their understanding of God's good nature.

They birthed an irrepressible insight about Scriptural interpretation that prompted them to plant their hermeneutical flag deep into the ground. They were willing to stand and contend against ANY dead literal reading of Scripture that maligned and defamed God's character by attributing to Him any kind of despicable behavior. The fathers believed that any Bible reading was dead wrong if it painted God as a child-drowning, infant-burning, throat-slitting, plague-sending, people-smiting killer.

"Saint Ambrose (and Augustine) took Paul's statement 'the letter kills but the Spirit gives life' as a slogan for allegorical interpretation." A. Berkeley Mickelson, INTERPRETING THE BIBLE, Eerdmans Publishing, 1963, page 34. Ambrose was the Bishop of Milan, was one of the four great doctors of the western church.

Origen, already quoted above, elsewhere wrote, "Ignorant assertions about God appear to be nothing else but this: that Scripture is not understood in its spiritual sense, but is interpreted according to the bare letter." (On First Principles 4:2.1-2, 4).

Gregory of Nyssa wrote that "allegory" allowed certain OT Scriptures to be "converted from the raw and indigestible state of their literal meaning into a wholesome and healthy intellectual food." (Hom., in Cant., prol.).

The great Western father, Augustine, taught that the harmful husk (literal reading) of Scripture had to be removed so that the valuable kernel (allegorical meaning) could be consumed. (On Christian Teaching, 3.12.18). Saint Augustine said, "If a passage seems to endorse wickedness or wrongdoing or to forbid selflessness or kindness, it is figurative and not to be read literally." He believed that all Scripture must be interpreted through the love of God and neighbor, on which all the law and prophets hang. Matt. 22:37-40. (Source: On Christian Teaching, see 3:10.14; 3:11.17; 3.16.24).

Augustine used the Rule of Divine Character when allegorizing, which essentially holds that the character of God revealed in Jesus cannot EVER be violated by the literal reading of ANY Old Testament Scripture. If the passage "appears on its face" to attribute unworthy motives, brutal behavior, cruel intentions, hypocritical

conduct, or coercive attributes to God, then it must be read allegorically and NOT literally.

"Wherefore, in the Old Testament there is a veiling of the New, and in the New Testament a revealing of the Old. According to that veiling, carnal men, understanding things in a carnal fashion, have been under the dominion, both then and now, of a penal fear. On the other hand, spiritual men... have a spiritual understanding and have been made free through love which they have been gifted." Saint Augustine (On Catechizing the Uninstructed 4:8; NPNF 1/3:287).

John Cassian stated the church fathers' dynamic bottom line against dead letter Bible reading in the following excerpt from Institutes 8.4: "And so, since these things cannot without horrible sacrilege be literally understood of him who is declared by the authority of Holy Scripture to be invisible, ineffable, incomprehensible, simple, and uncomposite, the disturbance of anger (not to mention wrath) cannot be attributed to that immutable nature without monstrous blasphemy."

Cassian, for example, demonstrates his four-fold exegetical method on the meaning of "Jerusalem": LITERALLY it is the city of the Jews; ALLEGORICALLY it is the Church of Christ; ANAGOGICALLY it is that heavenly city of God which is the mother of us all; TROPOLOGICALLY it is the

human soul, which frequently under this title is either corrected or praised by the Lord.

Simply put, the OT saints had a spiritual blind spot in that they thought Satan was God's left hand, his angry voice, in other words. So they would simply say that any particular destruction came from God's left hand of wrath rather than His right hand of mercy. Their notion of Satan was entirely different than what Jesus taught us about the Devil. Jesus is God's only hand. If we don't allow for that blind spot when interpreting the OT, we will be a victim of it ourselves.

Chapter One Hundred Fifteen

How did Paul "persecute God?"

How did Paul "persecute God?" By wrongfully committing wrathful acts in God's name. (Acts 7:59-8:3; 9:1-5).

How did Moses "fail to sanctify God's name?"

By wrongfully committing wrathful acts in God's name. (Numbers 20:7-12).

How did James and John "fail to know what spirit" they were operating from?

By wrongfully committing wrathful acts in God's name. (Luke 9:51-56).

How do WE persecute God, fail to sanctify His name, and fail to know what spirit we are operating from?

All together now... “By wrongfully committing wrathful acts (thoughts, words, deeds) in God's name (i.e., with us wrongfully presuming God's approval and support).

Or, put another way, if we eliminate committing acts of wrath in God's name, then we WON'T persecute God, but we WILL sanctify God's name/nature within us, and we WILL know what spirit we are operating from.

> "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, WITHOUT WRATH and doubting."
>
> 1 Timothy 2:8

Chapter One Hundred Sixteen

WHY DID JESUS APPEAR TO INSULT THE SYRO-PHOENICIAN WOMAN WHO BROUGHT HER AFFLICTED CHILD TO HIM TO BE HEALED?

I was recently asked this very good question.

"Matthew 15:22-28 gives the account of Jesus ignoring the woman who wants her child delivered from the demonic. It is hard to understand, as it seems slightly 'unlike' what I believe God's character to reveal. Why did Jesus appear to rudely tell her 'NO' at first?"

Here is the passage. "And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, 'Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.' But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, 'Send her away, for she is crying out after us.' He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' But she came and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, help me.' And he answered, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' She said, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Then Jesus answered her, 'O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.' And her daughter was healed instantly." Matthew 15:22-28

Here is my take on this passage. Jesus is showing here that God does not openly manifest according to "need." If He did, then he would instantaneously manifest wherever starvation or desperate sickness presented itself regardless of whether faith was present or not.

Here, Jesus made it clear by His apparent abruptness that the woman's need was not the deciding factor that prompted the healing manifestation. Rather, it was her

faith. Here is what we often fail to understand-- Jesus IS God's response to our need. He has already seen our need and reached forth His curative response. Jesus IS that curative response, THEN in His physical incarnation, and now in His spiritual incarnation within us.

Sure, Jesus was mission-sent first to the lost sheep of Israel, and sure the language He used might not have been as colloquially rude to his audience THEN as it seems to us NOW, but nonetheless what is clear is that it wasn't this woman's need that enabled Jesus' delivering virtue to flow to the woman's child. Rather, it was the woman's FAITH. God had already granted the provision for her need by sending Jesus. So simply restating and re-urging the need does nothing. All that was left for any who encountered Jesus was to receive it by faith.

This is a hugely misunderstood concept. Jesus is God's provision for our every need. He is God's resounding pre-given "YES" to our every future need. We are complete in Him, with ALL, ALL, ALL things provided to us for life and godliness (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). But we don't yet SEE all these provisions. He has given it by grace, but we haven't yet received it by faith UNTO manifestation.

We often still, without consciously realizing it, wrongly believe He hasn't already truly granted ALL things to us. Or that He may be willing for some but not others. So we redundantly re-present our need, seeking to move

His "undecided" grace into action. But that is wrong. His grace has ALREADY decided and moved into action long ago--even before the foundation of the world, His eternal YES was given. By His stripes we WERE healed (1 Peter 2:24). We just have to receive and believe it unto manifestation. Our "amen faith" merely endorses His grace's "already given," yes.

Jesus here is making it clear that it's not her great need that is causing Jesus to manifest healing, but rather her great faith. Jesus appears to the naked eye to be ignoring her need. "Appears" because He is already God's full provision, ALREADY given, God's absolute grace-gift to the entire world. Jesus here is merely confirming that the ONLY hindrance to His manifesting full curative provision to all is the absence of faith.

So, if Jesus had manifested a healing response to her need here APART from faith, it would appear that His healing was need-dependent and need-variable rather than faith-dependent and grace-constant.

The danger in all this is that we end up endlessly bringing our NEED to God instead of our FAITH. God already knows our need and has pre-responded to us in Christ. All that remains is for us to open His provision unto manifestation. The Syro-Phoenician woman knew by faith that Jesus brought the children's bread of deliverance to all-- first to Israel, of course, but then also to all the other who come TO or even UNDER the table. Her

confidence was based on the nature of God rather than on her own need for co-equal status with the lost sheep of Israel.

One last point, why did Jesus APPEAR to insult this woman by comparing her to an undeserving dog? Appearances can sometimes be both deceiving and revealing. Jesus tells us that the woman had "great faith," so we know there was something special Jesus wanted to flesh out and reveal about her to us to help us better understand WHY her faith was so great. That special quality Jesus wanted to reveal was her incredible humility, which stemmed from a steadfast confidence that God withholds His love and curative energies from NO person and NO people group. There are no exclusions to His generous love. No matter how much His apparent willingness to act APPEARED, she knew better. No verbal discouragement or apparent reluctance could detour her faith. Again, she knew better than to believe that God was unwilling to heal anybody and everybody at any time. And she was right.

Jesus knew this woman's chutzpah would push through any carnal offense or obstacle. I think Jesus' point is that things are not as they appear. His statement flushed out her chutzpah, her humility, and her faith that God couldn't say no to her, no matter how the situation "appeared" on its surface.

Anyway, it's my best two cents on it.

Chapter One Hundred Seventeen

Does taking communion still matter?

Yes. It's really a tender blast.

Communion is simply about daily focusing our waking energies on the Lord's indwelling name and nature.

Spiritually speaking, name-recognition is just nature-recognition.

To the Hebrew mind, "name" represents "nature." The name of a thing expresses the nature of a thing. This is

why Adam's naming of all living things was so important. He was prophetically calling forth their created purpose.

To pray in Jesus' name is to pray in His "nature," His very nature which now abides in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Galatians 2:20 exhorts us to no longer live by our OWN faith, but rather to "live BY the faith OF the Son of God."

When Scriptures promise that we will receive whatever we "pray for" in Jesus' name, it is not suggesting that the mechanical recitation of His name performs some magic spell. No, it is urging us instead to "put on" His very divine nature-- His faith, His love for His Abba and all creation, His virtuous valor, His energetic expectancy, His powerful passion, and His miraculous mindset.

To take the Lord's name in vain, seen from this angle, is using Jesus' literal name WITHOUT also donning His literal nature to prompt and empower us in all our ways.

Jesus' nature IS the armor of God we are to don.

Jesus' nature IS the mind of Christ we are to wear.

Jesus' nature IS our inheritance of BEING.

"The name [nature] of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe." Proverbs 18:10.

Communion is a conscious celebration and recognition of all the above.

"Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whosoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eats me, even he shall live by me." John 6 53-56.

Just like we go into our closet to "put on clothes" as our covering in the physical, we need to have a devotional closet of communal transformation wherein we consciously put on the virtues of Jesus as our covering for the Spiritual day ahead.

And it feels so good. We always already have His nature within us in seed form 24/7. Communion is a harvest celebration, a swizzle stick so to speak, where we nurture and focus on this incredible gift by stirring its elements up to the surface of our consciousness.

So drink Him up.

Consume Him up down deep.

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

This is done by a directed heart and an intentional mind. The Hebrews called this simple meditation technique "kavanah," a spiritual focus which acts in faith by praying

"as if the Lord's presence is opposite," face to face and heart to heart, in other words. The Lord's nearness is our good.

This is what communion really is: discerning the Lord's divine nature, His body, and then putting it on by heart-consuming it as "our necessary food." Jesus called it eating His flesh and drinking His blood, partaking of His divine nature, in other words.

Our sanctified imagination helps us during prayer/meditation to visualize partaking of His nature, putting on His armor, putting on His virtues, putting on the mind of Christ, putting on the Spirit of Christ.

Bon Appétit!

Chapter One Hundred Eighteen

What is Marcionism?

I have been occasionally accused of "Marcionism" because I advocate reading Old Testament passages Christo-allegorically (i.e., reading all the Old Testament passages as prefigurements of Christ and His soon coming inner kingdom of love and light).

Marcion was an early Christian who advocated eliminating the entire Old Testament as inspired Christian Scripture because the God it describes is incompatible with the New Testament nature of God revealed by Jesus.

Here is the problem with accusing Christological/Allegorical readings as Marcionite heresy. And it's a huge one for the hammer-heavy heresy hunters.

Allegorical reading is NOT Marcionism, not now, not ever.

First, Marcion never believed the Old Testament Scriptures were to be read Christologically or Allegorically, non-literally, in other words. Marcion believed that they weren't to be read at all. To Marcion, the Old Testament described a demonic demiurge, not the loving Abba of Jesus Christ. Thus, he allegedly believed that those Scriptures had no benefit. If true, then Christo-allegorical readings simply had no place in his canon.

Second, the majority of the early Church Fathers read the Old Testament Christo-allegorically. To label Augustine, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Ignatius, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Clement, Valentinus, Heracleon, Saint Ambrose, Ephraem the Syrian of Edessa/Nisibis, Philoxenus of Mabbug, and scores of others as all being Marcionites is outrageous. There were six known Christian theological schools in the early church: Alexandria, Antioch, Caesarea, Edessa/Nisbis, Ephesus, and Rome/Carthage.

The early Church's hermeneutic, except for the Antiochan school, largely held to a hermeneutic which commonly allegorized the Old Testament whenever it seemed to "literally" (by the dead letter) attribute evil or unworthy attributes to God. If this is Marcionism, then most all the church fathers would be called Marcionites, and THAT has never been so asserted by any competent

scholar of any age. Much of modern Christianity is woefully ignorant of our Patristic theology, and that is a shame.

Many who are called heretics today are actually in intimate alignment with what the church fathers and mothers wrote and taught, whereas many who claim the fundamental high ground couldn't be further away from the early church's views.

Third, to be fair to Marcion, none of his writings still exist. All we know about him today comes from those who loathed him as a heretic. What I attributed to him above may or may not be accurate. I would hate to have my enemies describe the worth and conclusions of my theology without any of my writings being available for review and confirmation. I can't tell you how often my proposals get misstated and twisted into things I have never come close to saying. Our ability to misunderstand and misstate one another's true position is humongous. Marcion may well have believed the Old Testament needed to be excised from the Bible. And if he did, then I believe he was wrong, and I disagree with him. But the lawyer in me wants to give him a chance to personally respond before we hang him up by his thumbs.

We need to trade in our hard hammers for soft ears that earnestly seek after the legacy the early fathers left us.

Just from a common sense angle, IF all (or even most) of the ancient accounts are true, that Marcion

believed that the brutal God the OT describes was an "actual"(not fictional) demiurge and NOT the God of the New Testament, then he is necessarily reading the OT "literally." That pungent conclusion can ONLY come from a strictly literal reading where the OT demiurge "delights to destroy" those who disobey them.

Marcion is NOT reading OT Scripture with the non-literal eye of Christo-allegory, anthropomorphism, or myth. That pretty much just leaves literalism. He obviously finds much of the OT literally unconscionable to NT Christian sensibilities. Thus, his reaction. Really, ONLY a literal reading could warrant such a massive excision of the OT altogether. My point is his extreme action in deleting the whole OT as canonical with one fell swoop is most consistent with the reactionary zeal which normally accompanies literal-centric hermeneutics.

By most all early accounts, Marcion believed in a "literal" OT demiurge as "literally" described in the OT. Most of the early Church Fathers loved the Old Testament, as Barth also once declared, far too much to read it just literally. Non-literal readings allowed the early church to purge all the satanic elements out of the divine nature that were suggested by just a literal reading.

Of course, I always keep a caveat in place where we don't have any extant writings of the person in question. For instance, I think it's unfair to hold Origen responsible for others who called themselves Origenists hundreds of

years later, after Origen died, and who may or may not have distorted or misrepresented his original teachings.

So, I would afford Marcion the same courtesy, at least in the form of a caveat. Marcionite churches of subsequent generations may or may not have accurately represented his original teachings. Also, his teachings may or may not have been accurately described by his critics. But, assuming there is some early fair-minded church consensus on his teachings, then I think we can make some strong, but rebuttal, presumptions about him, one of which is that he was a literalist.

"The most radical position was that of Marcion, who had rejected the OT altogether and attributed it to the creator god (the demiurge), rather than to the Father of Jesus Christ. The prophetic and allegorical interpretation of OT texts already found in the NT (especially by Paul, as in Gal. 4:21-26; 1 Cor. 9:8-10; 10:1-11) rendered the position of Marcion impossible except through a radical editing and excision of NT texts, a project that Marcion himself carried out consistently." Mark Sheridan, O.S.B., Dean of the Pontifical Athenaeum of San Anselmo, in his article on the "Old Testament" in THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO ORIGEN (2004). Sources Cited: Dawson (1992); Heine (1997); Lienhard (2000); Torjesen (1986).

"Marcion stood against 'allegorism' in any form, and resisted any attempt to connect Christian

thought to the fulfillment of Old Testament or traditions. Because of this, he was often an object of ridicule for later Christian writers (Irenaeus, ADVERSUS HAERESES 1:27; 4.38, 34; Tertullian, PRESCRIPTION AGAINST HERETICS 30-44, Clement of Alexandria, STROMATA 3.3-4, Origen, AGAINST CELSUS 6.53)...." John Anthony McGuckin, THE WESTMINSTER HANDBOOK TO PATRISTIC THEOLOGY, MARCION ENTRY (2004).

Chapter One Hundred Nineteen

What is theodicy?

The term "theodicy" refers to a branch of theology that deals with the justification of God's goodness in the presence of evil.

The difference between New Testament theodicy and Old Testament theodicy is light-years apart. We should study the Testaments from that angle, an angle which reveals why the Old Testament needs FURTHER and SHARPER differentiation regarding its image of God.

The Old Testament has the attributes of God and Satan (whether we see the devil as a dark dynamic or a dark angel) commingled and confused.

Jesus is the revealed nature of God, who is only light and love. He came in the New Testament to fully differentiate our image of God from our image of Satan. Jesus revealed that Satan is NOT God's left hand, NOT His angry voice, NOT His official minister of wrath. Jesus is God's ONLY hand. And that hand is light only and in it is NO darkness. All Satanic qualities are due to the angelic and human misuse of free will.

To the extent the Old Testament contradicts that view, it is less informed because it came at an earlier developmental stage where discernment and differentiation of the divine nature had not yet been mystically revealed and theologically honed.

Again, Jesus is the revealed character and nature of God. The New Testament was written in the wake of those who were with Him, touched Him, learned from Him, and who claimed that it was normative for those who believed IN Him to be mystically indwelt BY Him.

But who would want to be indwelt by a God who, if all we knew about Him came from a literal reading of the Old Testament, which on occasion paints Him as a child-drowning, infant-burning, throat-slitting, plague-sending, people-smiting killer.

The New Testament now fills in the gaping holes in knowledge about God's nature that the Old Testament left us. And when these gaps are filled, the

semantic content of the Old Testament changes into Christological manna.

Jesus taught us that when evil "tares" are sown among good "wheat," that it is not God who does it but rather, "An enemy hath done this." (Matt. 13:24-28). The Apostle John commented very clearly that God's purpose was not with evil but against it. "He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." 1 Jn. 3:8.

Jesus came to destroy the evil works of Satan by overcoming them with the Father's goodness. "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him." Acts 10:38. Satan comes to "steal, and to kill, and to destroy," but Jesus came that we "might have life" and "have it more abundantly." (Jn. 10:10).

Jesus' major point to us was to show that His Heavenly Father was always and only good. No Old Testament saint knew God as "Abba," an Aramaic term used by Jesus as a title for His Heavenly Father, which essentially means "beloved dad." Jesus came to reflect the Father's love, which never gives His sons "serpents" or "stones" or "scorpions," but instead freely gives His sons "bread" and "fishes" and "eggs" and most importantly "the Holy Spirit." (Lk. 11:11-13). This passage says that if Earthly

fathers "being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Heavenly Father give . . ." (Verse 13).

This is the same Father to whom James refers in the following passage: "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the Heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." (Jas. 1:16-17).

James strongly warns us to, "LET NO ONE SAY . . ." God is related to evil in any way, and "DO NOT ERR, MY BELOVED BRETHREN . . ." by saying that anything other than good and perfection EVER "cometh down from the Father of lights. . ." (Jas. 1:13,16). This was the message of the Gospel - God hasn't, doesn't, and won't allow evil. "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all". 1 Jn 1:5.

In God's eyes, evil has never been something to "allow," but rather is a malignancy which must be overcome. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good". Rom. 12:21.

What's radically different about God is that He always overcomes evil with the power of perfect goodness. God the Father is this way (Matt. 5:44-45,48), God the Son is this way (Acts 10:38), and so must we be this way as the body of Christ (Rom. 12:21). "Be you therefore perfect,

even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect." Matt. 5:48.

Part 8

Temp section